



I SAVED CAUSED THE TOO MANY AND GIRLS APO LITTLE CALYPSO

12

Author: NAMEKOJIRUSHI
Illustration: NAO WATANUKI

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



"Oohh!"

"Eek!"

*The king of Laputa
patted both Rachelle's
wings and Rain's tail
in fascination.*



"What?
Wait, is
this thing
really
cursed?!
You've
got to be
kidding
me!"

PHANTOM THIEF
**SHERLYN
DOTEYES**

SAMURAI GIRL
**CHIRIKA
SHINOMIYA**

"Atlantis...
is sinking."

PRINCESS OF ATLANTIS
**NYANYAN
ATLANTIA**

"Damn
you, Gold
Yaksha!"

A dynamic comic book illustration showing a character in a dark suit and brown pants falling through a city that has been completely destroyed. The character is falling head-down, with a long, glowing red energy trail or blood streamer following behind them. The background is a chaotic scene of shattered buildings, debris, and a bright blue sky. In the foreground, a dark, ornate metal railing is visible, suggesting the character is falling from a high vantage point. The overall style is high-contrast and action-oriented.

*I slammed my fist
into the ground below
and felt it give way.*

**"TAKE
THAT,
MASK!
TAKE MY
GREED AND
GIVE ME
STRENGTH!"**



A high school freshman. She is the girl-next-door childhood friend, and heir to the Omniscient Magic.

SATSUKI OTOMO



A high school freshman. Thanks to the Namidare bloodline, he keeps getting involved with girls that are in trouble.

REKKA NAMIDARE



A sorcerer from another world. She lives at Rekka's place and helps out with the housework.

HARISSA HOPE



A high school freshman. A space princess who's presently studying to be a bride on Earth.

IRIS FINERITAS GYPHERCALL



A high school freshman. She works at her family's restaurant, Nozomiya, and practices her cooking every day.

TSUMIKI NOZOMUNO



A demi-material being sent from the future in order to get Rekka together with a girl.

R



A wandering treasure hunter. Currently acting as a go-between for Rekka and the head of the Margaret family.

CHELSEA MARGARET



A second-year high schooler. A relative of Rekka's who carries the Banjo bloodline.

HIBIKI BANJO

A research scientist. Sent to Earth with Fam and Rain to keep an eye on them.



**SHIRLEY
MADAGASCAR WEL BLOOD**

A high school freshman. Also a centuries-old vampire. She has strong opinions about maids.

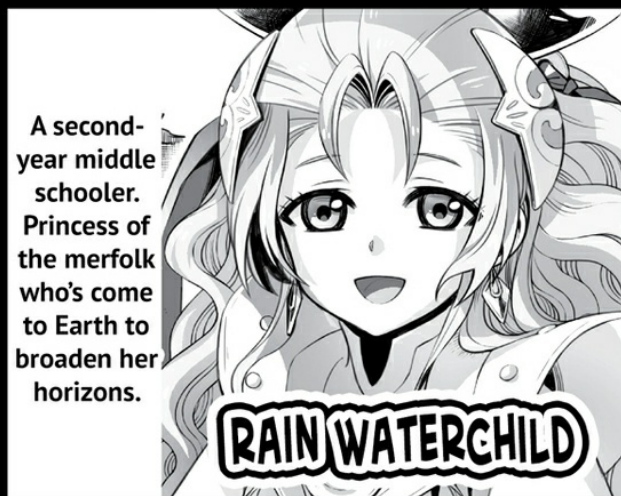


ROSALIND G. BATHORY



**ZAIRA
GARDENDOS CORONA**

A former hero and Demon King of another world. She left her domain to a regent and is currently staying at Rosalind's mansion.

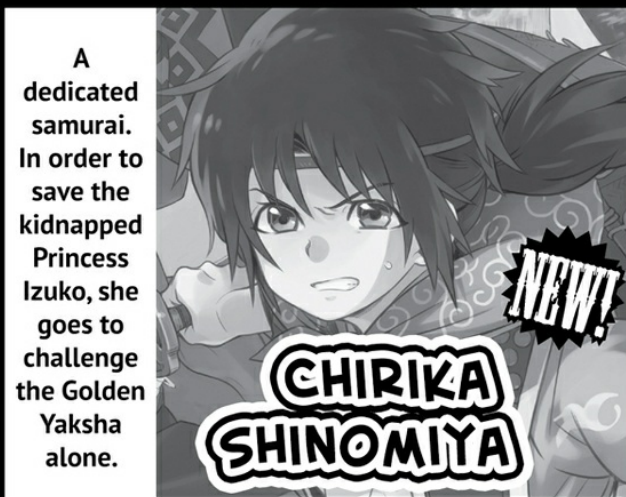


RAIN WATERCHILD



RACHELLE

Angel of love and passion. Currently freeloading at Rekka's and hungering for more carnage.



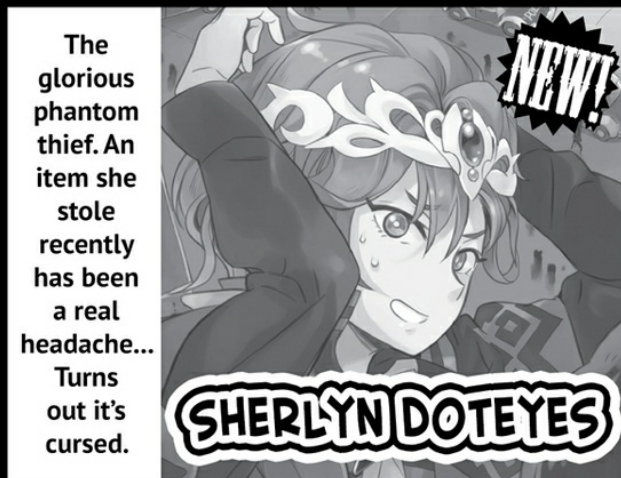
**CHIRIKA
SHINOMIYA**

A dedicated samurai. In order to save the kidnapped Princess Izuko, she goes to challenge the Golden Yaksha alone.



NYANYAN ATLANTIA

Princess of Atlantis. She's trying to find a way to save her sinking country and its people from doom.



SHERLYN DOTEYES

The glorious phantom thief. An item she stole recently has been a real headache... Turns out it's cursed.

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Prologue 1-1: Chirika Shinomiya

Somewhere on a dark mountainside, a shadow ran down an animal trail, noisily kicking aside leaves in its wake.

“Damn you, Gold Yaksha!”

The shadow—Chirika Shinomiya—clicked her tongue and cursed.

She wore a battle haori with familiarity, a conical hat tied around her neck, and carried her belongings wrapped in cloth. At the waist of her hakama hung a single katana. It wasn’t a shabby old blade picked up off the battlefield either, but a properly maintained blade representative of her status as a rare female samurai in this emergent time period of the warrior.

The fact that she was using her trained night vision to dash through the mountain on this rainy, moonless night with no difficulty at all was testimony to the fact that her outfit wasn’t simply for show. She was a natural swordswoman of a certain unnamed school.

And as for the reason why Chirika was running through the mountains in the dead of the night... Three days ago, her master, Princess Izuko, was kidnapped by a yokai that called itself the Gold Yaksha.

“If you want the princess back... then bring all the gold in the castle... to the Hidden Mountain.”

The Gold Yaksha had disappeared into the night with that whispered ransom note, the princess slung over one shoulder.

The Hidden Mountain also went by the name of the Disappearing Mountain, infamous for legends of people setting foot on it only to disappear and come wandering back several years or even decades later. And apparently, the Gold Yaksha was using it as its lair.

This situation is all a result of my failure as the princess’s personal bodyguard! I must retrieve her from that filthy yokai’s hands at once, no matter what!

Chirika had rushed out of the castle with that thought, determined to pursue the Gold Yaksha all the way up the Disappearing Mountain. She eventually

caught up with it at the summit, where a solitary Japanese cedar grew.

“Did you... bring the gold?”

The Gold Yaksha’s face was as terrifying as one would expect of a being called a demon. It was enough to make babies cry, ladies faint, and the elderly drop dead on the spot. But Chirika was no average girl.

“Prepare yourself!”

She whipped her katana out of its sheath without a moment’s delay and charged the Gold Yaksha. The yokai’s towering figure was roughly eight shaku (roughly 2.4 meters) tall, but it swiftly avoided Chirika’s blade with the dexterity of a monkey.

“Too slow!”

But Chirika could read its movements, and her blade followed right after it. However...

Clink!

“Tch!”

The Gold Yaksha’s arm was as tough as bronze, and the iron blade of the katana glanced right off. Chirika clicked her tongue and put some distance between herself and the yokai, bracing herself and aiming for its eyes.

I don’t see the princess. Was she stowed away somewhere...?

Chirika agonized over the predicament in her heart, worried sick for the princess’s well-being. Princess Izuko was the one who picked her up when she was teetering on the brink of death after losing her parents. She’d saved her life, and there were no words to express the gratitude Chirika felt for that. She would be indebted to the princess for as long as she lived.

Chirika had then honed her skills with a sword and was elated when she was promoted to the role of bodyguard. Chirika wasn’t born a samurai, but she had the natural disposition for the job. She swore absolute loyalty to her master and would happily lay her life down fighting. That master—Chirika’s one and only master—was Princess Izuko.

“Mrugh!”

Avoiding the heavy swing of the Gold Yaksha's arm, Chirika put some distance between them again. Her opponent had the advantage in agility and strength, but Chirika had techniques she'd risked her life to polish. Her body was still overflowing with vitality after running for three days and three nights thanks to the chi circulating in her limbs, too. All in all, they were evenly matched.

"Grrrgh!"

But Chirika refused to accept being at the same level as the Gold Yaksha. She was an excellent samurai, but she had the tendency to be a little impulsive.

"You fiend! Judging by that mug of yours, you were once a human, weren't you?! One that was so consumed by greed that you became a demon, no?!" Chirika yelled, pointing the end of her sword at the yokai's head.

Indeed, the Gold Yaksha's face was staunchly ragged, but it did bear some resemblance to that of a human man. It wasn't unheard of for people to turn into yokai. And for this one to be demanding gold... Chirika figured it must have been a man at some point in its miserable life.

"A lowly fool who's strayed from the path of humanity will never best me! I'll have you pay for the dire crime of kidnapping my princess right now!"

Rallying herself with those words, Chirika's chi grew even greater as she readied herself to leap at the Gold Yaksha once more... when suddenly, a flash of light came crashing down from the sky and directly struck the lone Japanese cedar on the summit.

"?!"

Chirika was swallowed in a flood of light like nothing she'd ever seen before.

Prologue 1-2: Nyanyan Atlantia

“Hahh, hahh, hahh...”

Nyanyan was running underground, beneath the temple. The polished marble floor was so smooth that it was free of the slightest protrusion that might scrape the foot of anyone running across it barefoot.

Normally, Nyanyan would have no difficulty running down this corridor, but right now, it was all she could do to stay standing. Because the corridor, the ceiling, the entire building was shaking violently. It was even worse than usual.

Oh, no, please no...

Nyanyan repeated those same fearful words in her heart as she ran as fast as she could.

The shaking had been going on for over ten minutes now. Cracks were already running down the walls. If she didn't get out soon, then she would be buried alive underground.

“...!”

Nyanyan let her handcuffed arms dangle loosely in front of her as she put all her effort into moving her legs up the stairs that led outside. It was no simple task. The shaking made it hard to walk on a flat surface, and the stairs were even more of a challenge. She had fallen several times just running down the corridor. She couldn't even brace herself properly with the cuffs on. She was already covered in scratches and bruises.

“Augh!”

She stumbled again, this time smacking her forehead on the stairs in front of her. A sharp pain ran through her head, making tears well up in her eyes.

“Ow...”

But Nyanyan still considered herself lucky. If she had fallen backwards, she would've fallen down the stairs. Already on her hands and knees, Nyanyan gave up on the idea of standing and simply crawled up the remaining steps one at a

time. The first thing she saw when she reached the surface... was that her hometown was sinking.

“No way...”

The unbelievable sight left Nyanyan in a stupor for a moment.

“Atlantis... is sinking.”

She was only saying aloud what was happening right in front of her, but she could still hardly believe it. Perhaps she was just feeling faint from all the running, but it all just seemed so utterly unreal.

But that didn't stop it from happening. Her homeland was indeed sinking to the bottom of the sea as she watched. Nyanyan collapsed against a pillar of the temple, lost for words.

There didn't appear to be any adults around to tap her on the shoulder and tell her to evacuate, so they must have run away already. But... where to? Just where could they have gone? How would they be saved? Was it even possible to save anyone? It was pointless to even ask. But if there was even a one-in-a-million chance, then...

“I”

Nyanyan turned on her heels and headed back inside the temple. She'd be placing everything on that bet.

Prologue 1-3: Sherlyn Doteyes

Wooooo, wooooo, wooooo!

The burglar alarm was blaring loudly. It overlapped the police sirens for a terrible chorus of electronic wailing.

A crowd of onlookers gathered outside the major art museum, making a commotion about a break-in. A few rude police officers were yelling at the clamoring reporters and masses.

“How inelegant.”

Looking down from the tallest tower in the city, the burglar who’d just nabbed the art museum’s greatest treasure let out an exasperated sigh.

This burglar’s name was Sherlyn Doteyes. However, that wasn’t what she called herself. She much preferred the term phantom thief. There were several gossip articles and people who even referred to her as a gentleman burglar. That was owing to how she used her talents. She took her spoils and sold them off to give money to the poor, or sometimes stole particular items to return to their rightful owners. But she herself wasn’t particularly fond of that title, either. She still much preferred being called a phantom thief.

When she told this to a friend once, that friend had asked why. Sherlyn answered, “Because phantom thief sounds much more elegant, don’t you think?”

Similarly, the fact that she wore a flashy cape and silk hat was simply because she believed that was the appropriate attire for the profession.

“Now then...”

Flicking the brim of her silk hat, Sherlyn picked up the treasure she’d set down on the ground beside her. The treasure she’d picked up this time was a crown salvaged from the depths of the Pacific.

“Hmm, the exhibition plaque said this was a king’s crown, but it’s small enough to pass off as a queen’s tiara, too.”

Perhaps it was designed to be worn by both men and women. Not that that really affected its value. The piece was absolutely exquisite. Compared to the wondrous ornaments described in literature, the craftsmanship of this crown far surpassed anything made in the same era.

There were doubts that it was merely a modern-made fake, but the appraisal revealed it to be genuine. I wouldn't have bothered to steal it otherwise.

Because of the impossible technology and skill that would have been required to craft it, newspapers all over the world had been reporting it as a “new part,” instantly increasing its value by several thousand times. However, the newspapers were all talking about something other than its price... The curse of the crown.

“Well, it’s a popular tale.”

Rumor had it that anyone who wore the crown would die, but they were merely rumors. Many such objects of value were shrouded in similar mystique. But it triggered Sherlyn’s curiosity, and she eyed it carefully as she spun it around her finger.

Let’s try putting it on.

It was a bit of an impulsive decision, half out of the desire to test the curse and half out of a desire to try such a beautiful tiara on for herself. Humming whimsically, Sherlyn removed her silk hat and placed the crown on her head.

“Oh, it fits just right.”

She didn’t have a mirror to see it for herself, but the fit felt right. And surely it looked as good as it felt. She could probably blend in with the royals in England with no problems right now.

When she thought of it that way, it made her a little reluctant to part with it, but that was how it had to be. Just thinking of all the poor families she could help by fencing it, she knew this would be the end of her royal charade.

“Now that the officers have all gathered, I guess it’s time to make my exit. The buyer’s waiting for me at the port, anyway.”

Sherlyn stood up and lightly brushed the dust off her cape.

“Oh, can’t forget to put this away.”

Remembering that she still had the crown on, Sherlyn went to remove it. However...

“Hm? ...Huh?”

It wouldn’t come off.

“Huh? What?”

No matter how she pulled at it, it was like it had welded to her skin and wouldn’t budge.

“Ow...!”

Maybe it was her imagination, but it felt like the crown was gradually getting tighter...

“What? Wait, is this really a curse?! You’ve got to be kidding me!”

Sherlyn’s shouting echoed through the night sky colored red by the flashing lights on the police cars below.

Chapter 1: The Story that Crossed Time

As we flipped a page on the calendar, it was that time of year to change out our wardrobes with the season.

“It’s been so long since I wore my blazer. It feels pretty good.”

“Yeah.”

“Even though it’s still hot...” Iris whined as she fanned her face with a hand.

Despite it being October now, the sun was still beaming down like it was summer. Simply standing in it was enough to make sweat build on my forehead.

“Phew, it’s hot. I’d rather lose the jacket if it’s gonna be like this...”

Several of the other boys in my class were already abandoning their blazers and hanging them on the backs of their chairs during class.

“If Rekka strips, I’ll strip too!”

“No, Iris. It sounds weird when you put it that way.”

Several of the boys in the class were now sending me death glares.

“Honestly, what detestable heat. This season was a little cooler a hundred years ago.”

Rosalind came over from her seat further away and made a similar complaint. She had visited Japan over a hundred years ago, so she wasn’t exaggerating just now. She was being quite literal. Global warming was scary. Well, as scary as it was, there were more pressing matters that I was afraid of right now...

“It’s midterm season again, huh? I hate tests even more than the heat.”

“Right?” echoed Iris.

“Indeed,” agreed Rosalind.

“You three... need to study more.” Satsuki sighed in exasperation at the three of us who hated studying.

“That’s easier said than done.”

“Right?”

“Indeed.”

“You’re all so in sync...”

Satsuki looked a little sad.

“We should have another study group like the one we did for summer vacation homework. We can invite Tsumiki too,” I suggested.

“Yes, let’s do that,” Satsuki agreed.

“Want to go to the library again? Or should the four of us gather at someone’s house?”

“Hey... Don’t leave me out.”

Rosalind raised a complaint this time, interrupting me and Satsuki. Come to think of it, we’d never invited Rosalind to a study group before. Not that we did them very often or anything.

“You wanna come too, Rosalind?”

“Yes,” she answered immediately.

I didn’t think she was that motivated about the tests... She always seemed so bored during class.

“Then let’s have one at Rekka’s house after school today,” suggested Satsuki.

“Huh? We’re starting today?” I asked, startled.

“The sooner the better. We only have two weeks until midterms.”

Well, when she put it that way, it was hard to object. I knew I had to study, but having to study *now* was a real buzzkill... Was this simply the destiny of an underachiever?

“Yay! Then let’s meet up at Rekka’s house in the afternoon!” cheered Iris.

“Indeed, I shall look forward to it,” said Rosalind.

“Since we’ll be intruding on you, I’ll help Harissa with dinner for tonight,” offered Satsuki. “Let’s drop by the shopping street on our way home from school.”

In contrast to me, Satsuki was super excited. Even Iris and Rosalind looked

happy about it... And I thought they were on my side.

“How peaceful it is around here...”

R didn't seem too interested in all the good cheer, and she let out a big yawn before settling into a mid-air nap.

Well, in spite of climate change and midterms, peaceful was good. We hadn't had any world-shattering incidents over the past two weeks, which might be a new milestone. Yes, peaceful was very, very good.

“Huh? What's wrong, Rekka?”

“Nothing... I was just thinking I'm getting totally jaded...”

Thinking back on it now, too much had happened over the past half a year. Was there any other high school student born in Japan who could thoroughly appreciate these peaceful days more than I did? Okay, maybe that was being a bit dramatic.

Anyway... most of my problems stem from me sticking my neck into things, so maybe I'm really just reaping what I sow.

“Okay, then it's settled. Rekka's house after school. Make sure you let Harissa know too, Rekka.”

“Yes, ma'am,” I replied to Satsuki from where I lay sprawled across my desk.

I wasn't involved in any stories right now anyway. It would be as good a chance as any to try and catch up on my studies and act like a real student for once. Though I'd probably fall asleep midway.

“We'll have to ask Tsumiki if she'll come along too later... Huh?”

Suddenly, the cellphone in my pocket started to ring. I checked the caller ID before answering.

“What's up, Hibiki?”

“You got a minute, Rekka?”

“Yeah, but class is starting soon, so make it quick.”

“Class is about to start here too. I'll get straight to business,” Hibiki said without much preamble. “I want to borrow your power, Rekka.”

“...”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

Well, that sure was an abrupt end to the peace... is what I was really thinking. But that’s how it always is, right? Here we go again.

“What happened now?”

I inquired as to her reason for wanting to borrow my power.

“You see... Actually, this came from Chelsea. One of her friends seems to be in a bit of trouble.”

If it was Chelsea-related, then maybe it was something about magic? Or maybe something about treasure hunting? I was hoping it was one or the other, because I didn’t really want to have to deal with the Margaret clan anymore. The current head of that clan, Nartessia, was generally a calm person, but extremely scary when angry...

“I see. What kind of trouble?”

“She’d got a friend named Sherlyn Doteyes. Apparently, she’s under some kind of curse.”



After school that day, I was waiting at my house for Hibiki to show up with Chelsea’s aforementioned friend, but...

“You’re still gonna insist on this study session thing, huh?”

“We’re students. Studying is what we’re supposed to do,” said Satsuki with a sigh from across the table. “And you have no room to complain, mister! You completely bombed the first semester. At this rate, with all of your unexcused absences, you really are going to be held back a grade.”

“Urk!”

Okay, touché. I couldn’t really argue there. I guess I’ll give it an earnest go while I wait for Hibiki to get here...

But just as I got my notes organized and seriously cracked open a textbook,

Iris threw down her pencil and declared she was tired of studying.

“Hey, what’s Harissa up to? I’m getting hungry.”

“I’m also a bit peckish,” Rosalind agreed with a sleepy yawn.

“Shall I make something?” offered Tsumiki.

“Definitely not!”

“Certainly not!”

“Absolutely not!”

“Huh?! Why not?!”

Iris, Rosalind, and I all shot down Tsumiki immediately, but that only made her get defensive. She shouted right back at us, fists clenched and everything. I wished she would just take a hint already.

“Oh my gosh, you guys! We only just started!” Satsuki scolded, seeing as how we’d quickly derailed the whole studying thing again.

But Iris didn’t pay her the slightest bit of attention.

“So, Rekka, where’s Harissa?”

“She should be out grocery shopping for dinner, but now that you mention it... she’s kind of late.”

Normally, she’d be back by now. But just as I was starting to get a little worried, I heard the doorbell and Harissa’s voice.

“Sir Rekka!”

“Sounds like her now.”

I stood up and headed for the front door. If she rang the doorbell, that had to mean she had both arms full with shopping bags. I was planning on helping her carry them to the kitchen, but when I opened the door...

“Sir Rekka! Erm, I found someone collapsed just over there... What should we do?”

Harissa looked up at me anxiously, the prone body of a samurai slumped over her back.



“That’s a samurai, right?” I asked, unsure.

“It certainly looks like one,” Satsuki replied.

“It totally does. No matter how you look at it, that’s gotta be a samurai,” Tsumiki agreed.

We continued muttering to ourselves as we looked down in awe at the new face Harissa had brought home, someone who was now asleep on the living room sofa.

The battle haori over his shoulders and the trademark hat on his head tied under his chin with string. The beautiful katana hanging from his waist. The tabi socks on his feet, and the zori sandals we left at the door... Yeah, by all appearances, this was most definitely a samurai.

That said, in modern Japan, the only places you ever saw samurai were in period dramas and at theme parks like Edo Wonderland. They shouldn’t be lying on the side of the road in a random podunk town like ours.

“What’s a samurai?” asked Iris, unfamiliar with the term.

“My, this brings back memories,” said Rosalind with a somewhat nostalgic look on her face. “I remember seeing one once a long time ago.”

I know we just went over how we were supposed to be studying and all, but this definitely took priority now. Figuring out where the samurai even came from in the first place would have to wait too.

“Sir Rekka, I’ve brought some water.”

“Thanks, Harissa.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll go make something light to eat.”

“I’ll help,” offered Satsuki.

The two of them then went into the kitchen together. Tsumiki tried to follow them, but Rosalind stopped her.

“Let’s start with the water first, okay?”

A samurai collapsed on the street, huh? Now that I think about it, Rachelle the

fallen angel's story had started in a pretty similar fashion. Granted, in her case, she was after some incomprehensible "love energy" and not actual food... Whatever. I might not know anything else about him, but this samurai guy definitely looked human. Surely regular food and water would be okay. And with that thought, I kneeled down next to the sofa and helped him sit up some so he could drink a little something.

"Hm?"

How come this guy's back was so soft to the touch? Aren't samurai normally, like, super beefy and rugged from all their training? Huh, well, this guy *did* look pretty young, so I guess he wasn't quite there yet. Anyway, I lifted the cup to his lips and carefully tilted it.

"...Mm, mgh."

He swallowed the water and groaned a bit. His eyelids then fluttered for a moment before slowly opening.

"Oh, you awake now?"

"..."

He just stared at me in a silent daze, so I leaned in a little to see if he was all right, but...

"...Insolent fellow!"

A punch was all I saw coming.

"Gwah!"

M-My nose...! I pressed a hand against my stinging face as the samurai jumped to his feet on the sofa and reached for his katana.

"Where is this?! Why am I here?!"

"First, please calm down."

Tears welled in my eyes from the pain, but I stood up and reached a hand out to try and reassure him. My vision was just blurred enough that I misjudged the distance, however, and I put my hand right on his chest instead of his shoulder. Wait... His chest under that battle haori was even softer than his back.

“Wh-Wh-Wha—!”

And now he was freaking out even more for some reason. Don’t tell me...

“H-How dare you?!”

“Uwah! W-Wait a minute!”

Yeah, there was no mistaking that reaction.

“You’re a girl?!”

I realized my mistake and tried to apologize immediately, but the samurai *girl* refused to hear me out. She simply drew her katana and held it aloft, glaring down at me with clear killing intent.

“I’ll cut you down where you stand!”

“Gyaaaaah!”

She really was about to cut me down, but when she went to swing her sword...

Grrrrumble!

It seemed her hunger had overpowered her rage, and she swooned back onto the sofa.

“H-Hey, are you all right?”

“I’ll... cut you...”

She was still trying to put up a fight, but it wasn’t particularly convincing with her eyes spinning in circles like that.



“Hold it, Rekka! Did you touch that girl’s chest just now?!” Iris demanded to know.

“No, it was an accident!” I tried to explain.

The battle haori she was wearing concealed her chest (despite how big it felt when I *accidentally* touched it), and she had a pretty boyish face, so I’d honestly thought she was a guy...

“Disgusting,” muttered Tsumiki.

Oof... That single word felt like a knife to the heart. And the dirty look Rosalind was giving me only made it hurt more.

But in the midst of my suffering, innocent Harissa poked her head out from the kitchen.

“Sir Rekka! I’ve made some udon for now... What’s wrong?”

She blinked repeatedly in confusion upon seeing the swooning samurai with her katana drawn.

“Oh, uh... Nothing.”

It was too bothersome to explain, so I confiscated the katana for now and retrieved the freshly cooked udon from Harissa.

“...Mwuh?”

The smell of food wafted over to the swooning samurai. The next thing I knew, her nose was twitching, and she was completely awake again.

“Smells good...”

Her eyes were totally locked on to the steaming bowl of udon. She really must have been hungry.

“Here you go. It’s hot, so be careful.”

She accepted the chopsticks Harissa offered her without thinking twice, and then began wolfing down the udon at a genuinely impressive pace.

“She sure is a busy one, what with that fainting and waking up over and over routine and all,” Rosalind muttered in exasperation as she observed all this.

Once the bowl was completely emptied, the samurai clapped her hands together in thanks and bowed her head to us—or to Harissa, to be exact.

“Thank you kindly for the meal. I finally feel like myself again. I do not know where I am or who you are, but allow me to express my gratitude.”

“You’re in Sir Rekka’s house. If you’d like to thank someone, you should be thanking him.”

“Muh?”

Hearing that, the samurai looked at me and grimaced.

“...So, you are the master of this house? I am in your debt.”

The look on her face told me she was still mad about me touching her chest earlier.

“Yeah, that’s me. I’m Rekka Namidare. Erm, do you mind if I ask your name?”

“I am Chirika Shinomiya.” The samurai girl—Chirika—introduced herself in a clear voice before looking around at everyone else in the room. “Now, where is this place? There seem to be a great many foreigners here. There are also many objects I have never seen before... Is that glass? Not even the glass in the castle is so clear.”

“W-Wait, hold up a second.” I tried to get Chirika to pump the breaks. “Sorry, but would you mind answering some questions for me first? I’d like to hear about your situation, Chirika.”

“I’m afraid not. My priorities lie elsewhere. I must hurry back to the Gold Yaksha and save Princess Izuko forthwith.”

“Princess Izuko...?”

“You peon... You know not of Princess Izuko? The very same who is famous for being the fairest maiden in all the land?”

Chirika looked quite surprised by this development, but I’d never heard of anyone by that name. I asked Tsumiki about it just in case it was a celebrity or something I didn’t know, but even she shook her head.

A princess in distress? Check. A samurai come to save her? Check. But one

who talked in such a strangely old-fashioned way...?

“No...”

That all added up to one thing in my head. It was a ridiculous conclusion to come to, I admit, but this wouldn't be the first time something like it had happened. I couldn't rule it out.

“Hey, Satsuki, could I check with you about something?”

“Sure.”

And by “check with her about something,” I really meant I needed her to check with Magic of Omniscience for me. Specifically, I didn't yet know if Chirika was a heroine or not. There was a possibility she was just a cosplayer with a really overactive imagination. So I leaned over and whispered my concerns to Satsuki, who then got up and discretely left the room so she could use her magic.

“You there, answer me this: is this really the Land of the Rising Sun?” Chirika then demanded.

“The Land of the Rising Sun?” I asked, head cocked to the side.

“She means Japan,” Tsumiki whispered in my ear.

“Aah, right, yeah, you don't have to worry. We're in Japan.”

She was probably worried she'd ended up in a different country upon seeing Iris and Rosalind, who were decidedly non-Japanese. Then again, it wasn't that rare to see foreigners in Japan these days. If she was reacting oddly to that, then that had to mean Chirika was...

“Rekka,” Satsuki called out to me as she reentered the room.

“...How did it go?” I asked tentatively.

“I think it's exactly as you suspected,” Satsuki answered with a slightly troubled expression. “Chirika seems to have timeslipped here from the past.”



According to Satsuki, Chirika had come to the present from the Sengoku period over 500 years ago.

“You’re saying... this is a future world?”

And Chirika was understandably astonished when we told her this. To be fair, though, I think anyone would be. Hearing you’d travelled into the future was probably about as shocking as it got. It was easily on par with getting abducted by aliens or transported to another world. And having been through both of those things, I certainly wasn’t expecting her to take me at my word right away.

“H-Hmm, I’ll admit that I found your manner of dress to be inexplicable. But this is the clothing of the future, you say...? S-Still, I cannot believe you so easily. I demand some kind of proof.”

Despite Chirika’s shock, she still managed to point the end of her katana at my face and question me. That was dangerous.

“Proof, huh?”

I picked up the remote control that was lying around and hit the power button. One beep later, the TV was playing the ending scene of some soap opera rerun.

“Bwuh?! Th-There’s a person in the box! How mysterious!”

“Wah! Wait! Don’t attack it!”

I quickly pacified Chirika—who was poised to cut the TV in half—and showed her the back of it, explaining that there weren’t actually people inside.

“I see... Yokai sorcery, is it?”

“No, that’s not what I meant at all.”

After showing her my cellphone and the refrigerator too, she finally accepted that we weren’t using some kind of sorcery about 30 minutes later.

“Hmm... Very well.”

Chirika finally nodded, crossing her arms and closing her eyes as though she’d come to a conclusion on something.

“So, do you believe me now? That this is the future?”

“For the most part. You see, something comes to mind now...”

There, Chirika began to tell us the story of her fight with a monster called the

Gold Yaksha.

“...Then, just as the Gold Yaksha leaped at me, a bolt of lightning struck the cedar at the peak of the mountain and enveloped the entire area in a mysterious light. Be it the work of the Disappearing Mountain or that demon’s sorcery, I know not, but I believe that was how I came to be banished here.”

Honestly, it was all rather vague for something that had just “come to mind,” but she seemed convinced by it.

“Chirika, there’s actually one more thing I need to tell you about. It’s about me.”

“Hm?”

I gave Chirika a brief explanation of the Namidare bloodline.

“The future sure has some curious karma at work indeed...”

“You’re telling me...”

“Does this make me one of your so-called ‘heroines,’ then?”

“That’s right,” I said, looking over to R for confirmation.

“What, you couldn’t tell? How many more hints do you want her to drop?”

Okay, that was uncalled for, but I guess she was right. There was no mistaking that Chirika was a heroine at this point, which meant that she was here for a reason—her story.

“Hmm, thinking about this rationally, shouldn’t Chirika’s story be to get her back home?”

Putting together everything Chirika had told us so far, I took a stab in the dark...

“No, that’s wrong.”

And was immediately shot down by the heroine herself.

“If you truly are the heir of a line of heroes capable of overturning tragedy, then surely it must be Princess Izuko you are meant to save.”

Princess Izuko? As in the princess she mentioned earlier?

“Come to think of it, you said you were trying to rescue her, right? What happened?”

“It all started three days ago...”

In this case, Chirika’s “three days ago” was actually hundreds of years in the past. In other words, she meant three days before she travelled through time.

“A monster called the Gold Yaksha appeared in the castle of the lord I serve.”

“You mentioned him before too, but who is this Gold Yaksha guy?”

“I do not know.”

She delivered that line so deadpan that everyone in the room nearly hit the floor.

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“A monster is a monster. His true identity is of no importance to me.”

Rather than being that she didn’t know, it seemed more like she didn’t care.

“...”

And after what she said, Rosalind was now frowning.

“The real problem was that he somehow managed to slip past the castle’s defenses. He made his way inside... where he kidnapped the princess and demanded a ransom in exchange for her return.”

“A ransom?”

“Gold, to be exact. He dared to ask for the entire castle’s worth.”

“A yaksha is basically a kind of demon, right? What would a demon want with gold?”

That part didn’t quite make sense to me, so I turned to Rosalind... who was arguably a kind of demon herself.

“Demon or not, many supernatural beings desire wealth. In fact, do you not have a tale in this land about a boy who slew some demons and plundered their horde?”

“Huh, yeah, you’re right.”

Now that she mentioned it, that was basically the story of Momotaro. I guess it didn't really matter whether or not demons could even use gold; it was still a status symbol. But all this talk seemed to trigger something in Chirika, and she clicked her tongue angrily.

"How dare a mere yokai lay a hand on the princess! And to demand all the gold in the castle on top of that... That despicable, greedy monster!"

"...Ha!"

Rosalind suddenly scoffed at Chirika's abusive rant about the Gold Yaksha. Naturally, the samurai took offense to the vampire's attitude and glared at her sharply.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking that if your precious princess is really so important to you, you could have just paid the gold and been done with the whole affair. And if you aren't willing to pay for her life, then I guess she wasn't worth all that much to you to begin with."

Rosalind's cold assessment made Chirika's face twitch a little.

"That is an entirely separate matter."

"But your castle garrison was collectively unable to prevent this Gold Yaksha's intrusion, were they not? So instead of some futile attempt at a rescue mission, wouldn't your princess have stood a better chance if you had simply paid the ransom?"

Rosalind was being especially harsh with Chirika. Her attitude earlier really must have gotten under her skin.

"You... I don't care if you are a child; I will brook no further contempt from you!"

"Who are you calling a child?!"

Chirika was moments away from drawing her katana again, and the flames of fury in Rosalind's eyes were reaching ever higher.

"H-Hold it right there! Both of you, calm down!" I hurriedly interrupted the tense atmosphere between them. "I understand Chirika's situation now, so now

we need to focus on finding a way to save that princess! So please, let's not fight for no reason, okay? You need to stop picking fights too, Rosalind."

"Hmph!"

Rosalind crossed her arms in displeasure and turned away. Chirika glared at her for another moment before heaving a deep sigh to calm herself and removing her hand from the handle of her sword.

"I owe you for the meal you provided me, so I shall oblige for now."

"Th-Thanks..."

I didn't quite understand her logic, but I was willing to take it for now. I was just happy things had calmed down. Or, at least, I thought they had.

"But I will not stand for being belittled so. My efforts were not in vain," Chirika suddenly declared. "Rekka, place that apple on the chair and kindly stand before it."

She was pointing to an apple Harissa had brought into the living room and was just about to start peeling.

"Huh?"

"Make it quick."

At Chirika's behest, I placed the apple on the chair and stood in front of it, just like she wanted. Once I was in place, she drew her katana and took a strange stance.

"H-Hey now..."

"Don't worry. I shall not cut you."

I would have been freaking out a little more if she weren't outside of arm's reach right now. There was even a table between us.

"Wait, what are you going to do to Rekka?" Iris asked Chirika worriedly.

Chirika didn't take her eyes off me as she replied, "Don't make me repeat myself... I shall not cut him!"

And there, she swung her sword.

“Uwah!”

I couldn't help screaming, but the blade never reached me. Although... I did hear what sounded like something falling right behind me.

“Hm?”

I turned around to see the apple cleanly sliced in two, each half lying on either side of the chair.

“Whaaaaat?!”

“The apple suddenly split in half... No, it was cut?”

“What was that just now?”

Everyone else was just as surprised as I was. I picked up the apple halves to inspect them. And sure enough, the fruit had clearly been cut in two. I had a perfect cross-section.

“Did you cut it, Chirika?” I asked.

“That's right,” she confirmed, slipping her katana back into its scabbard.

Her overflowing confidence certainly made it seem like she had, but how was that possible? I was standing right in front of it, and her sword slash only caught air.

“Magic?”

“Nope, that wasn't magic. I couldn't sense any mana,” said Satsuki.

Well, if it wasn't magic, I was out of ideas. I honestly had no idea how she'd done it.

“Hmph, that's a strange technique you have,” Rosalind muttered with a snort.

“Technique?” I asked.

“That's right,” Chirika replied. “It's one of the secret techniques passed down in my sword school. It's called the Silkworm Slash, and it uses a blade made of chi to cut through physical objects at its user's discretion. Once mastered, it's capable of cutting a silkworm without disturbing its cocoon.”

“Huh, that's impressive.”

Now that she mentioned it, there wasn't a single mark on the chair or anything else. She hadn't swung her sword haphazardly, but carefully to hit a specified target. Not just anyone—and not just any samurai, either—knew secret techniques, though. Chirika looked like she was about my age or maybe even a bit younger, so for her to be at this level must have meant she'd been through a considerable amount of training.

"I see. So shields and armor would be pointless against this," said Rosalind.

"Well? Do you comprehend the extent of my abilities now?" Chirika asked, proudly sticking her chest out as she turned to Rosalind.

But Rosalind simply gave a shrug of her shoulders and said, "The subtlety of your skill is what I would expect from a Japanese swordsman. But as far as combat abilities are concerned, the people of the West have long surpassed human limits through training. I wouldn't be so arrogant at your level."

"Grrrrr!"

Despite having just met, it seemed the two of them already had it out for each other for some reason. I was starting to worry about where this was going, but luckily, the doorbell rang.



Temporarily putting aside my fears about the sparks flying between Rosalind and Chirika, I went to go get the door. It was Hibiki, Chelsea, and an unfamiliar face.

"Oh, it's you guys... Right, we need to work on something too."

"What is that supposed to mean? Don't tell me you forgot we were coming."

"Um, well, no. It's not that I forgot. It's just that a lot has happened this afternoon, and it kinda slipped my mind."

"...Should I ask?" Hibiki heaved a partially exasperated, partially resigned sigh.

"My, you really never change, do you, Rekka? Well, I guess that's what makes you so reliable." Chelsea laughed a bit, and then turned to introduce the girl behind her. "This is Sherlyn. I'm sure Hibiki mentioned it over the phone, but we came today to ask for your help. Sherlyn, this is Rekka. He's the jack-of-all-

trades problem solver I told you about before.”

“Nice to meet you, Rekka. I’m Sherlyn Doteyes, and the pleasure’s all mine,” Sherlyn said, offering her hand.

“Oh, my, what do we have here? Another heroine with that older sister feel, I see,” remarked R.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Sherlyn,” I said, trying to ignore R as I accepted Sherlyn’s handshake.

She smiled, and I have to admit it caught me a little off guard. It was charming for sure, but there was also a fierce, leopard-like beauty to it. Some kind of elegant, feline power. That was just kind of the whole vibe she gave off, I guess. She seemed like the type who could slip her way out of anything... But above all else, what really caught my attention about her was the overly ornate crown on her head.

“Oh? You curious about this?” Sherlyn noticed my line of sight and flicked the crown on her head. “Does it suit me?”

“Uh, yeah, it does.”

“Ahaha. You don’t have to force yourself to compliment me,” Sherlyn said with a good-natured laugh. “This little puppy is actually my biggest headache right now.”

“Huh?”

“Let’s discuss the details inside, Rekka.”

At Hibiki’s urging, I let the three of them into the house.

“More foreigners....” Chirika commented when she spotted Chelsea and Sherlyn.

Having recovered somewhat from the shock of her strange situation, she seemed to be settling into her own groove. But when Hibiki saw her...

“A samurai? Hey, Rekka, don’t tell me...”

“Then don’t ask.”

“...I know it’s really too late for me to be questioning this now, but how do

you always manage to get dragged into such ridiculous stuff?”

“I honestly couldn’t tell you.”

Hibiki and I both sighed in unison. Since we shared similar bloodlines, we both understood how the other felt.

Meanwhile, Sherlyn was exploding in a fit of excitement upon seeing Chirika.

“Oh my gosh! You’re a ninja, right?! Amazing! I’ve never seen the real thing before!”

“A ninja? No. I’m a samurai.”

“Samurai? Either way, it’s a first for me! Will you take a selfie with me?”

“What is this... ‘selfie’?”

Wow, that was a heck of a generational gap *and* a cultural gap.



“Never mind that. What did they come here for?” Chirika pointed to Sherlyn and asked.

“Well, Sherlyn’s actually in a bit of a bind right now, so she came to me for help,” I explained.

“What?” For some reason, Chirika sounded rather unhappy about this. “Boy... Weren’t you going to save my story? We must rescue Princess Izuko without delay. You do not have time to waste on anyone else.”

“H-Hey now, wait just a minute...” I scrambled for the words to respond to Chirika’s flash of anger. “Your story is important to me, but so is Sherlyn’s. I fully intend on saving you both, but I can’t prioritize one over the other. So... could you please hold on for a little longer?”

Chirika still seemed somewhat displeased, but she nodded grudgingly. She probably only accepted my request because she didn’t have anyone else to rely on. But it wasn’t like she was being selfish. I knew she was only snapping at me and demanding my help like that because she was desperate to save Princess Izuko. Yet as much as I wanted to help her, I had to help Sherlyn too.

“Sorry about that. Now, could you tell me what happened? I think Hibiki mentioned some kind of curse.”

“That’s right. Miss Samurai over there is waiting, so I’ll keep it short,” Sherlyn said, then flicked the crown on her head like she had earlier. “Plain and simple, this crown is cursed. According to the rumors, anyone wearing it will die in ten days.”

“In ten days?!”

“Uh-huh. And it took some time to track you down and get here, so I have three left, to be exact. And with every second that passes, it squeezes a little tighter around my head.”

Sherlyn had been speaking lightheartedly, but when I looked closer, I could see her forehead was pale and covered in a light sheen of sweat. She seemed to have been in pain for a while now.

“Where did you even find something like that...? If you’re a friend of

Chelsea's, are you a treasure hunter too?"

"Nah, not me. I don't have any interest in the treasure itself," she said, shaking her head.

But then she looked up and snapped her fingers. A great, billowing puff of smoke appeared at her feet and filled the room in the blink of an eye.

"Uwah! Harissa, open a window!"

"I-I'm on it!"

Harissa was the closest to the window and managed to get it open. The smoke quickly cleared after that, although it left everyone's eyes watery.

"Blech, maybe that was too much smoke..."

That included Sherlyn too, apparently. This *was* her doing though, wasn't it? Maybe she actually had a screw loose somewhere... Or so I had to wonder, but then my vision completely cleared.

"Huh? Sherlyn, your outfit..."

"Yup, I wanted to surprise you a little, but I kinda botched that one," she said with a laugh.

She was now wearing a silk hat on her head and a cape neatly draped over her shoulders. The crown was peeking out from beneath her hat, but the getup still distinctly reminded me of...

"A magician?"

I could almost see the rabbit and playing cards in her hands.

"Nope. I'm not an illusionist either, although I can do some magic."

"Then what are you?" I grumbled, wanting to know the answer already.

"Sorry, sorry. I'm actually a phantom thief."

"Phantom thief? You mean like a burglar?"

"That title sounds so unrefined, so I don't care much for it... but you're not wrong."

I wasn't expecting a burglar—I'm sorry, a phantom thief. But I'd saved the

likes of space pirates, mad scientists, and vampires before, so I wasn't opposed to helping her as long as she explained herself.

"Wait, does this mean you obtained that crown by..."

"I most gracefully snatched it out of the exhibition at the museum."

"..."

I was rather rudely about to remind her that people tend to reap what they sow, but I bit my tongue. Meanwhile, Chelsea tapped Sherlyn on the forehead.

"Oh, come on. Enough with the pretense. He's going to save you, so tone it down a notch and just explain already," she said with a tired sigh before turning to me. "Don't mind her, Rekka. Sherlyn does steal things, but she's known as a gentleman burglar where she's from. In other words, she shares what she steals with the poverty stricken."

"Really?"

I looked to Sherlyn, whose response was a shrug and a wry smile. It was almost like she was a little embarrassed about it... I have to say, I didn't get her at all.

"She's also originally from a family that can use magic, so we have that in common and kept in touch even after I left the Margaret clan."

"I see... Wait, 'originally from'?" I asked.

This time Sherlyn tapped Chelsea on the forehead.

"Now, now, Chelsea. You shouldn't go revealing a woman's past like that. That's got nothing to do with this," she said, pointing to the crown on her head.

All in all, between what I'd seen of her and what Chelsea had said, it didn't seem like Sherlyn was a bad person. I decided I'd help her if I could, and pushed the conversation forward.

"All right, I get how Sherlyn obtained the crown. But how did you know about this curse, Hibiki?"

"Well, Chelsea asked Nartessia to investigate this for us... and that's where we ran into trouble."

Don't tell me she demanded something in return for her research... Ugh, just thinking about it made me nervous. She really scares me.

"What's the trouble?" I asked fearfully.

"As it turns out... That crown is apparently a relic from Atlantis."

"A relic from Atlantis, huh?" I thought for a few seconds... then cocked my head to the side. "What's Atlantis?"

Several people in the room dead fell over.

"Seriously? Atlantis is pretty famous, you know," Tsumiki said, leaning on the table as she stood up and looked at me with dubious eyes.

"W-Well, it's not exactly something we learned in school, so maybe that's normal... Maybe..." Satsuki muttered, somewhat backing me up as she also stood up from where she'd fallen.

S-Seriously though? Had I just said something *that* stupid?

"Atlantis is the legendary continent that's said to have sunk into the ocean," Hibiki cleared her throat and explained. "But again, as a legend, no one actually believed that it was real. That is, until Nartessia deciphered the curse on the crown and found it brought death upon anyone who wore it... anyone who isn't Atlantian, anyway."

Ah, okay. So with that kind of curse on it, that would imply that Atlantis was real and that people from it did actually exist.

"And Nartessia was unable to remove that curse?"

"More like... she refused to," Hibiki said dejectedly.

"The curse itself is ancient and the spell overly complex, so breaking it would take more time and effort than I have interest for the project...' is what she said," Chelsea muttered in a resigned voice.

"Hey, wait a minute. If Nartessia can do something about it, why don't we just get her to do that? If you need some collateral, I can go get something from Aburaamu, the spirit world, or even the demon world that might interest her," I suggested enthusiastically, but Hibiki and Chelsea shook their heads.

“The problem is time. Sherlyn only had ten days from the start, and Nartessia said it would take longer than that to break the curse under the present circumstances.”

Yeah, I guess breaking it would be pointless if it was too late by then...

“But if we can’t break the curse, then how exactly do we save Sherlyn?”

“Mind you, Nartessia only said it would take too long *under the present circumstances*,” she repeated with emphasis.

“So then, what’s the plan?”

“According to Nartessia, in order to cast a curse with a formula this complex, an appropriate site would’ve been prepared. In other words, a ritual hall. If we can find clues about the nature of the curse there, then we can significantly shorten the time and the work that will have to go into breaking it.”

“Ah, okay.”

That meant there was still hope. Except that was when Tsumiki interrupted with a conflicted expression.

“But that crown is a relic from Atlantis, right? Even if it really did exist, wouldn’t it be at the bottom of the ocean by now? How would we even know where to look?”

That was true, but we had friends who could help us with both of those problems.

“Satsuki, please figure out the exact location of Atlantis for me.”

“All right.”

That was easily the kind of thing the Magic of Omniscience could find, so that was one problem down. As for the other...

“I’m going to head out for a bit.”

“Where are you going, Sir Rekka?”

“Just over there,” I said as I pointed out the front door.

I wasn’t going far, really. Just across the street to visit my neighbors from an ocean planet.



And so, a total of thirteen of us—me, Satsuki, Iris, Harissa, Tsumiki, Hibiki, Chelsea, Shirley, Rain, Corona, Rachelle, Chirika, and Sherlyn—made our way out to the middle of the Pacific Ocean in search of the lost land of Atlantis.

For the record, Rosalind went home when she heard this was going to be a submarine trip. She'd suffered through that once on Berano, and had no interest in doing it again. Apparently being stuck at the bottom of the ocean had traumatized her that badly. But in exchange, she'd sent Corona to come along and help us out. Apparently, we were free to order her around. Rachelle, on the other hand, had simply tagged along uninvited. She just so happened to show up at the house before we left.

"Mwahaha! The army of young ladies has increased yet again! This smells like the start of more carnage!" she'd mumbled before imposing.

Anyway, I'd gone across the street to recruit Shirley, who was now serving as the helmsman of our deep sea operation. Rain was a mermaid, so having her around while we were in the water was always reassuring. I'd wanted to invite Fam along too, but she'd gone out to play with her friends for the day. As such, Shirley's assistant, Garnet, had stayed behind to mind the house until Fam returned. The rest of our crew was made up of everyone else who'd been hanging out at my house.

"We're ready to dive now," Shirley announced from the captain's chair.

"All right, let's do this," I replied.

Her submarine made from cutting-edge space technology descended into the ocean with terrific speed. In no time at all, the water on the other side of the windows was pitch black. It was actually pretty scary, but Shirley had reassured me that her submarine could stand up to any and all conditions on Earth, so I put my faith in her and her machinery. Moreover, it seemed like I was the only one worried...

"We haven't been to the bottom of the sea since we went to Ryugu Palace on Berano!"

"It's a lot darker here than it was there, though."

“On Berano, we light up the turtlebus routes for the tourists.”

Everyone else was excitedly reminiscing about our time on Berano. As for Corona and Rachelle, who hadn't been with us back with then...

“This is my first time seeing the bottom of the sea.”

“Heh heh heh, I wonder how much love energy I'll get to soak up here!”

They were both looking forward to our deep sea expedition, although the dumb angel was drooling over something that didn't really have anything at all to do with the ocean.

“...”

But while everyone else was in high spirits, Chirika was sitting cross-legged on the floor... away from the group and with a sour look on her face. I figured there was no helping the bad mood part, but I knew it wasn't good for her to be isolated like that. Making up my mind, I left the cockpit and walked over to her.

“What do you want?” she asked flatly without even bothering to open her eyes as I sat down next to her.

“Nothing, I was just wondering what you were up to.”

“I'm not up to anything... Though if it weren't for you dragging me along on this misadventure of yours, I'd be out searching for a way to save Princess Izuko right now.”

Ouch... Cold, but okay. It was true that I'd asked her to come along with us instead of searching for a way to return to the past, and I'd apparently earned her ire by postponing her story for Sherlyn's. That being said, as long as she was a heroine, that meant I was the only hope she had. I knew why she was upset, but I still couldn't just leave her by herself, which was why I'd brought her along... But now it seemed I'd completely lost her trust, leaving us at a diplomatic stalemate.

“Do, uh... Do you want something to drink? How about some juice?”

“No.”

Ugh... We were barely gonna get through a conversation like this, much less resolve her story. I was feeling discouraged, but forced myself to buck up and

try talking to her again...

“...”

And the only answer I got was silence. Hmm, was there something I could bring up that would get her to talk? Anything would do, really, but it wasn't like I knew her all that well... All I really knew was that she was a samurai of impressive skill and that she wanted to save—ah, that's it!

“Can you tell me about Princess Izuko?”

“...!”

There, Chirika finally reacted. Hearing the princess's name, she opened her eyes and turned to look at me.

“Why do you want to know about Princess Izuko?”

“Well, your happy ending depends on the safety of Princess Izuko, right? So I'd like to know anything I can that might help me save her.”

I *was* going to save her; that's what I needed to remind Chirika of in order to get her to open up to me.

“Princess Izuko saved my life,” she said.

“She saved your life?”

“That's right. I was not born to a family of warriors. I'm a mere commoner from a small village deep in the mountains. My parents were nothing to speak of, but I lost them at a young age when bandits raided our village.” Chirika recounted her past, speaking slowly and steadily with a far-off look in her eyes as she recalled those dark days. “Then, the local lord stepped in and subjugated the bandit threat. Princess Izuko spotted me at the time and picked me up.”

“So that's what you meant when you said she saved you?”

“Yes... Thanks to the princess, I was able to remain by her side as a playmate. And when I grew older, I began learning the way of the blade so that I might protect her and return the favor. It was my absolute honor to be promoted to her personal bodyguard.”

“I see.”

So all that training she'd put in to learn things like the Silkworm Slash was ultimately for the princess. And that was no modest feat... Princess Izuko must have been really important to Chirika for her to dedicate herself like that. No, to say she was dedicated was an understatement. Princess Izuko meant everything to her. That must be why it was so hard to accept me putting off helping her to go on this ocean adventure for Sherlyn.

"Thanks, Chirika. That gives me a much better idea of your relationship with the princess."

"Good."

"So, next is... Let's see... To save the princess, we'll need a way for you to return to the past, but we'll also need to defeat the Gold Yaksha, right? Can you tell me more about him?"

"I told you everything earlier. He's a filthy fiend that kidnapped the princess to hold her ransom."

"So you don't know anything else about him?"

"Anything else? Let me think... This is merely conjecture on my part, but I suspect that he may have once been human."

"Really? How can you tell?"

"As a student of a fighting style that teaches the ways of chi, I am sensitive to the presences of others. And his... There was a faint hint of something human mixed in. There's also his face. His visage is terrifying, but possesses features that are still somewhat human."

So the Gold Yaksha used to be human, huh? I knew Ai, who'd turned from a cat to a yokai... But I didn't realize that humans could do that too. I'd have to ask Satsuki about that later.

"So, if he used to be human, then there must be some reason he turned into a yokai, right?"

What was in the Gold Yaksha's past that had driven him to become the Gold Yaksha? I rubbed my chin in deep thought, but Chirika snickered.

"Man needs but little incentive to stray from the path of humanity. He was

most likely so consumed by greed for wealth that it transformed him into a monster... Disgusting.”

“...”

With a name like “the Gold Yaksha” and a reputation for kidnapping people for ransom, yeah, it seemed fair to assume it was something along those lines... But nevertheless, I felt like she was jumping to conclusions a little too soon. Well, that could all be researched later.

“Okay, so how strong is this Gold Yaksha guy? You said he infiltrated the castle alone when he kidnapped the princess, right?”

“...”

Reminded of her failure to protect the princess, Chirika’s indignation and fury flared up. She fought through it and continued talking to me, though the expression on her face said it all.

“Firstly, he moves with the agility of a monkey despite his large build. He climbed the outer walls of the castle in the middle of the night and snuck directly into the princess’s bedchamber.”

“Okay, okay... So that means the Gold Yaksha kidnapped the princess without fighting anyone, right?”

“No. I chased him to the Hidden Mountain where I faced him in combat so that I might fell him and retrieve the princess.”

“Okay, okay... Huh?”

“His skin was as tough as steel, and—”

“No, hang on a minute.”

Something about what Chirika had just said caught my attention, so I had to interrupt her and rewind a bit.

“What?” she asked.

“I was just wondering,” I said. “Based on your story, it sounds like you chased the Gold Yaksha and fought him alone...”

“That would be correct. What of it?” she asked with absolute confidence.

“Okay, okay, okay... Hang on. The princess got kidnapped, right? Isn’t that the kind of thing the lord usually sends the whole army out for?”

That’s what I’d been assuming had happened this entire time, but it seemed I’d had the wrong idea. But who just goes chasing after a monster all on their lonesome? I know I could never do that.

“Why did you go and fight the Gold Yaksha alone?”

I tried to nicely suggest she’d been a little reckless, but...

“Protecting the princess is my duty,” was all she had to say.

I could tell by the tone of her voice that she didn’t think anything of putting her life on the line for her job. Gosh, what was I supposed to do with her? I thought her dedication to the princess was impressive before, but now I was starting to think it was more of a danger.

“...What?” Chirika asked, fidgeting uncomfortably under my fixed gaze.

“Hey, Rekka.”

But just then, Hibiki walked over.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Shirley’s saying we arrived at our destination. Get over here.”

“All right.”

“...”

After my brief exchange with Hibiki, Chirika rose to her feet and retreated further away to sit silently on her own again. While I was worried about her, our immediate situation had to come first, and so I followed Hibiki to the cockpit.

“Heya, Shirley. Hibiki says we’ve reached Atlantis?”

“We’ve reached the coordinates Satsuki gave me, yes.”

I tried looking out the submarine window, but everything was still pitch black.

“Let’s increase our visibility,” Shirley said.

She then pressed a button on the console, and all of the lights directly under the front of the submarine came on at once, illuminating our surroundings.

Then...

“Oooh!”

Yeah, then we could all see it. The massive sunken ruins of a city sat before us on the ocean floor. Despite its current state, it was easy enough to imagine how grand the city must have been in its heyday. Buildings that looked like houses stood in organized rows, and the roads between them neatly navigated the whole affair.

“Wow... This is amazing,” said Chelsea in awe.

“According to the Akashic Record, Atlantis sank here some 1,500 years ago. It’s one thing to learn about it, and another thing altogether to see it here in person...” remarked Satsuki.

“Yeah. I’ve explored lots of ruins as a treasure hunter, but there’s really something special about places like this.”

Chelsea and Satsuki were both staring out the window in amazement. And rightfully so. Surely this would be considered one of the greatest discoveries of all time, but unfortunately I had no interest in that right now.

“Shirley, based on what Satsuki was able to learn, the ritual hall where the curse was cast on the crown is inside a temple. Could you search the area for anything that looks like one?”

“Certainly. That shouldn’t be too hard to find,” Shirley reassured me as she commanded the submarine’s controls to begin the search.

Satsuki had been able to get us coordinates for the temple specifically, so we shouldn’t be too far off from it...

“There. I believe that’s it.”

In a few short moments, Shirley shone one of the sub’s spotlights on a magnificent-looking building. I certainly would’ve believed it was a temple.

“Satsuki, can you tell me if that’s it?”

“Give me a minute.” Satsuki took a moment to confer with her magic and make sure we were in the right place. “Yup, this is the temple.”

“So now it’s a matter of getting inside. Can you take us in, Shirley?”

I looked to our helmsman for an answer, but she looked somewhat conflicted.

“According to the data I’m getting from the ultrasonic scans, the temple is supported by pillars that are too narrow for the submarine to pass through.”

“Then can you figure out where the ritual hall is?”

“I’m not sure. I know next to nothing of magic, so I can’t even say for sure I’d recognize one if I saw it,” Shirley said with a defeated shrug.

“Want me to look it up?” offered Satsuki.

“No,” I replied. “We don’t want you running out of mana too soon. There’s still too much we don’t know right now.”

We’d made that mistake before. Satsuki’s Magic of Omniscience was a very powerful tool, but it needed to be used wisely. We’d be in a real bind if we needed it down the line and didn’t have it.

“For now, Shirley, search everything you can with the submarine. Anywhere we can’t get with the sub, we’ll just have to go out and explore ourselves.”

“Are you sure? Deep sea diving requires specialized training.”

“Crap... Really?”

That was a problem.

“Hibiki, can you do it?”

“If we were just talking regular diving, sure. But I haven’t had any deep sea training before either,” she said with a shake of her head.

If Hibiki couldn’t do it, I was hoping treasure-hunting Chelsea might have some clever devices meant to help search underwater ruins... But she shook her head too. It was starting to seem like we were running out of options. I started scratching my head when I felt someone tap me on the shoulder.

“Rekka.”

“What’s up, Rain?”

“I heard everything. Just leave this to me.”

Rain placed a hand against her chest proudly and nodded with an elegant smile full of confidence.



For a mermaid like Rain, diving—even at depths like this—was child’s play. She accepted a waterproof mic and flashlight from Shirley, transformed her feet and legs into fins and a tail, and then disembarked from the submarine.

“Can you hear me, Rain?”

“Yes, Shirley.”

Shirley used a mic in the cockpit console to radio Rain, who was still just outside the sub. She wanted to check and make sure everything was working before Rain actually entered the temple.

“All right, it seems the mics are working. Now, how about your flashlight? Can you turn it on?”

“Yes, it seems to be fine.”

Rain turned her flashlight on and off to demonstrate. Really, she had the flashlight and the headset, but no other gear to speak of. Unlike us regular humans who would need oxygen tanks and rebreathers and whatnot, Rain was born ready to be in the water. Anything like that would only weigh her down.

“So, that girl is a yokai too...” murmured a skeptical Chirika.

“I thought she was quite striking... But a mermaid, huh? How elegant,” remarked Sherlyn, her eyes sparkling.

Their reactions were polar opposites of each other.

“So, uh, Sherlyn’s not surprised to see a mermaid, huh?” I whispered to Chelsea, who was standing next to me.

“She’s from a magically inclined family like mine, so she’s pretty worldly when it comes to the unusual. Not to mention she’s open-minded to begin with.”

“I see.”

Come to think of it, when she found out Chirika was a genuine samurai from the past, she was more excited than surprised, too.

“All right, Rain. Could you check underground first? We’ll be waiting just outside for you.”

“Understood.”

Following my request to a T, Rain headed straight for the underground level of the temple. We could follow her into the temple with the submarine, but that was about it. We parked in the wide open room before the inner sanctum.

“This feels almost like the front courtyard of the temple,” Hibiki murmured as she looked out the window.

“Yeah?” I said, looking out the window too. “Check out all those broken statues and things.”

They were all crumbled to pieces, making it impossible to tell what they really were originally. Since we were in a temple, I figured maybe statues of gods?

“This is Rain reporting. I’ve made it underground, but there’s... a jail? It looks like the underground layer is some kind of dungeon.”

“A dungeon? In a temple?”

That strange combination gave me a bad feeling.

“If there’s a dungeon, doesn’t that mean the king of this land lived here?” Corona asked rather suddenly—and rather strangely, I thought.

“The king? What makes you think that?”

“Oh? Do you do things differently? In my castle, I always threw rebels in the dungeon.”

Corona and I both looked at each other in puzzlement, but fortunately Satsuki was able to step forward with some answers.

“Atlantis probably didn’t have separation of church and state. The king likely also had judicial power—that is, the right to judge crimes.”

“But this is a temple, isn’t it? Why would a king live in a temple?”

“Hmm... In ancient times, there was the Yamataikoku, where religion held the greatest power. Maybe Atlantis was the same way?”

In other words, the king was also the priest and the presiding judge?

“Whatever it was, this place really is incredible.”

“We’re going to revise world history when we get back...” Satsuki said with an exasperated sigh.

I had plenty more to ask her, but just then...

“KYAAAAAH!”

The blaring sound of Rain screaming came in over the console.

“What’s wrong?!” Shirley asked immediately.

“Gh-Gho—”

But Rain cut out before she could finish answering.

“Shirley!” I called out.

“We’re charging in!” she immediately responded.

Shirley then flattened the control stick, throttling the submarine into the inner part of the temple. It was as big as it appeared to be from the outside, but all of the pillars holding it up made it impossible for us to do anything other than squeeze ahead. We went as far as we could, but it didn’t take long for us to be completely stuck.

“Where’s the entrance to the underground that Rain used?” I asked.

“There’s a staircase to the right, but...” Shirley replied hesitantly. “It’s no good. The submarine won’t fit.”

“And we can’t force our way through?”

“The building would collapse. The sub is sturdy enough to plow through without a problem, but Rain...”

“Damn... Hey, Rain! Rain!”

I kept calling for her, but there was no response. What could have possibly happened this deep in the ocean? It must have been really out of the ordinary to make an ocean-dwelling mermaid like her scream down here...

“I don’t care—we have to go save her! Shirley, how many diving suits do you have?”

“I brought one for everybody, but it would be reckless to all go at once.”

“Then it’ll be me and...”

I was suddenly reminded of the conversation we’d had earlier about how deep sea diving requires specialized training. I couldn’t ask any of the girls to go out with...

Knock, knock!

My train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the sound of someone knocking on the sub window. Wait... Someone... knocking on the window? I turned to look.

Knock, knock!

On the other side of the thick glass, Rain was waving to us all. She didn’t have her headset on, but she didn’t appear to be hurt, either.

“What? Did you drop your mic or something?”

Don’t scare me like that...

I sighed with relief to see her safe, but... Why *had* she dropped her mic? And what was that scream about?

“My apologies. That would be because I scared her...” an unfamiliar voice said.

“Huh?”

It certainly wasn’t the voice of anyone we’d brought with us. I turned to see who it was...

“My name is Nyanyan Atlantia. I have been waiting for you for a very, very long time.”

...and saw a half-transparent girl sticking just her upper body through the wall of the submarine, bowing her head with a piteous look on her face.

Chapter 2: The Priestess of Atlantis, Nyanyan

“An ethereal being...?”

“Yes. You see, if you take the ether—the smallest unit of life—out of the physical body, it can be preserved indefinitely. It is through such a ritual that you see me before you here. But whereas I have been released from the mortal coil you know, my spirit is now bound to this place,” the exotic-looking girl who introduced herself as Nyanyan explained.

“So you’re kind of, like, haunting the place?”

I didn’t understand this whole “ether” business, but it sounded an awful lot like being a ghost. Basically, she was immortal in a way, but it came with serious drawbacks.

“And Rain ran into you underground and mistook you for a ghost, dropping her mic in her surprise?”

“Yes, I’m very sorry.”

Rain’s shoulders slumped as she sunk to her knees—her tail transformed back into legs, of course. Shirley and I had both told her it was fine, but she was a conscientious girl by nature and was still apologizing.

“Well, putting that aside... Who are you and what are you doing here, Nyanyan? If you’re bound to this place, you must have some connection to Atlantis, right?”

She was a ghost haunting—no, she was an ethereal being bound to a sunken temple of Atlantis. If she were really a ghost, that would imply she had died. But she’d said something about a ritual. That implied that she—or someone else—had made her this way.

“Listen, Nyanyan, if someone forced you to become an ethereal being and is keeping you prisoner here, I’ll—”

I probed into the possibility the ritual had been against her will, but Nyanyan shook her head gently.

“Thank you for your consideration, but I chose to become this way. You

needn't worry."

That was a relief to hear for now, but it also brought us back to my original question: who was she and what was she doing here?

"I used such extreme means to evade the clutches of death and have waited here, vigilant and alone, all these years... I did it all to fulfill but a single wish."

"A wish?"

I repeated her words in a question, and she nodded her head solemnly.

"So, please, I beg of you... Save my homeland from destruction."

Hearing those words left me bewildered for a moment.

"Your homeland...? You mean Atlantis, right?"

"Yes."

"..."

How was I supposed to tell her that it had already been destroyed? Like, hundreds of years ago. Did she not realize we were already on the bottom of the ocean? Was there even a way to save this place? I looked over at R just in case.

"You guessed it. She's a heroine."

Yeah, go figure. But that meant that there still had to be some possibility of saving this story. No, hold on... I can't get ahead of myself. Based on what Nyanyan had said, she became ethereal on purpose so she could wait here for someone. Surely she wouldn't have done that without a plan—without a plan to save Atlantis.

"Nyanyan, do you have some idea of how we might save your homeland?"

"I do," she said with a nod. "Please continue through to the innermost sanctum. Your vehicle can make it there, though you must be careful not to bump the pillars."

Following Nyanyan's instructions, Shirley began carefully navigating ahead.

"Sorry, do you have a moment?"

While we were moving deeper into the temple, Hibiki approached Nyanyan.

“Yes. How can I help?”



“If you’re Atlantian, is there any chance you’ve seen this crown before?” Hibiki asked, indicating Sherlyn’s head.

“That’s...!” a shocked Nyanyan gasped when she laid eyes on the crown.

“Do you know it?”

“Most certainly. That is the very same crown that has been passed down through generations of the Atlantian royal family. There is no way that I would mistake it,” Nyanyan declared with confidence.

That seemed pretty definitive, yeah.

“Okay, then do you know about the curse cast on it too?”

“Yes... I believe so,” she answered, this time averting her eyes.

If she knew about the curse and what it did, then she probably understood what kind of situation Sherlyn was in right now. That would explain her reaction.

“Great. That means we can cut to the chase. Is there any possibility you know how to undo the curse? If you do, please share it with us.”

“Very well... But I would ask that you be patient. It will be much easier for me to explain how to remove the Mouse Bind once we reach the inner sanctum.”

I was guessing “Mouse Bind” probably referred to the name of the curse. Hibiki and Sherlyn both agreed to wait, however, and we all looked out the windows as we made our way to our destination. We eventually made it through the room with the pillars and arrived in a wider room with what looked like a rectangular altar enshrined in the center.

“This is the temple’s divining altar,” said Nyanyan.

“Divining altar?”

“This is the technological heart of Atlantis... and why I chose to become ethereal.” There, Nyanyan took a graceful bow. “Allow me to introduce myself properly. I am Nyanyan, the daughter of the previous king of Atlantis and the first in line to succeed the throne.”

“Which means... you’re a princess?!”

I mean, I thought she was extremely elegant and regal—despite being a ghost—but I hadn't expected her to be a princess.

"I figured you were royalty, but to think you're the crown princess... So, you do know about the curse—this Mouse Bind—don't you?"

In stark contrast to my surprised self, Hibiki was calmly asking Nyanyan for details.

"The Mouse Bind is a charm to prevent thievery. If anyone other than an Atlantian—or rather a member of the Atlantian royal blood—wears it, it will continue to constrict around their head until they perish. The only one that can undo it is the king of Atlantis himself."

"The king of Atlantis? So... there's no way for you to undo it?"

"No... I'm afraid not," Nyanyan said as she lowered her head.

Those words should have induced utter despair in the subject of said curse. But all Sherlyn had to say in a voice that didn't sound panicked at all was...

"Jeez... What a pickle."

Which left *me* freaking out instead.

"Aren't you worried, Sherlyn?"

"Hm? Oh, sure I am," she replied almost indifferently.

"Sure doesn't seem like it..."

"There's still time yet. And if I'm going to cry, I'll save it for the one-hour mark, you know? It's not like sniffing about it right now is going to save me."

That comment left me as awed with Sherlyn as I was when we met. It seemed my first impression of her wasn't that far off the mark.

"Ohoho, what's this? The older sister type heroine turns out to be manlier than the hero himself?" R cackled.

...And I couldn't argue.

"Now, don't get me wrong. If you're telling me there's absolutely no way of saving me, even *I'm* going to be upset," Sherlyn said, looking to Nyanyan with a wry smile.

It was like she was asking if there was still a way. And in response, Nyanyan answered...

“There is... one way.”

There, everyone’s eyes fell on her.

“The divining altar has a great many powers, but among them is the ability to stitch together space-time coordinates and jump between points.”

“Bwuh?!”

Several people on board sputtered and stared at the ethereal princess with unbelieving eyes.

“Wait, what...?” I asked. “What does ‘stitch together space-time coordinates’ mean?”

“Erm...” Shirley wiped her mouth, hesitating to explain for once. “To put it simply for you... It’s not dissimilar from the save function in a video game. The stitched space-time coordinates are quite like the timestamp on a save file. So if what she says is true... If things ever go wrong, you could use this so-called altar to return to your previous save point and redo them.”

“H-HUH?!”

Yeah, okay, the video game analogy made sense to me, but once it made sense, it blew my mind. A free pass to go back in time for infinite mulligans had to be breaking some kind of rule! And, actually, that raised another question altogether...

“If you have such an amazing hidden trick up your sleeve, how did Atlantis come to sink in the first place?”

“There’s a complex reason for that,” Nyanyan answered, casting her eyes downward with a forlorn expression. “Traditionally, the space-time coordinates for Atlantis were stitched together anew once a year so that, should a natural disaster or some other great calamity befall us, the king could return to the past to prevent it. That was how we maintained our prosperity. However...”

“Did something happen?” I asked.

Nyanyan gave a small nod and closed her eyes. Then the space next to her

warped, and an older guy with a tough physique and hair styled like a seahorse on his head suddenly appeared.

“Huh? Who? Where... Oh, it’s just an image?”

“This is one of the abilities of etheric technology. I am able to project memories from within my mind as images for all to see,” Nyanyan explained at our surprise. “This man’s name is Boboza... He was the younger brother of the previous king, my father. He’s also the man who staged a coup d’état to seize the throne after my father passed away.”

“A coup?!”

“So this Boboza man became the next king instead of you?” Shirley asked, adjusting her glasses.

“He staged things just before my coronation ceremony, to be precise. I was captured by my uncle and imprisoned in the dungeon of this temple.”

“...That’s despicable.”

How could he imprison a girl like that? A feeling of disgust welled in my chest, and I could tell it was showing on my face.

“No, I was simply too childish back then. There’s no helping the hatred my uncle felt for me... However, the detail of great importance here is that my uncle staged the coup d’état three days before Atlantis sank. Furthermore, in order to prevent me from returning to the past, my uncle restitched the space-time coordinates the day the coup succeeded.”

“So... In other words, the save point is now three days before Atlantis sank rather than a year before?”

“That is correct.”

Yeah, that made a big difference.

“But even if you can only return to three days before it happened, can’t you at least then warn everyone to run away?”

“The ritual to return to the past is a heavily guarded secret, handed down only to the legitimate king. As soon as the previous king passed away, I was entrusted with it... but returning to the past requires a certain amount of

preparation. Atlantis sank with absolutely no warning at all, so it wasn't possible to go back in time to that fated day. The best I could do was become ethereal, which was a ritual that didn't require any advanced preparation."

"I see..."

Basically, multiple events had conspired to spell the ruin of Atlantis.

"Even with this amazing technology, the city was still destroyed in the end..."

"Sadly, yes..."

When Nyanyan finished explaining everything, I paused for a moment before approaching the topic once more.

"Um, this is rewinding a bit, but basically what you want to ask of us is to return to the past and stop Atlantis from sinking, right?"

"Verily, it would be wonderful if my homeland were able to survive... But I know not why it so suddenly sank. Preventing it may be impossible."

"Really? But then..."

So that wasn't her wish after all? I was about to ask, but she gently shook her head.

"It's true that is what I wished for when Atlantis first sank. But after taking this form and spending these many years at the bottom of the ocean all alone, I have realized just how many people I relied on to live before," Nyanyan said, bringing her hands together as though in prayer and bowing her head. "That is why all I desire now is for the former citizens of Atlantis to survive. I wish for their safety and nothing more."

"...I see."

I refrained from saying anything unnecessary at Nyanyan's earnest words.

But a story to return to the past and redo it, huh? I'd done something similar once before, and this seemed every bit as hairy.

"There's just one thing I'd like to confirm. I've travelled to the past once via psychic powers, but in that instance, it was only my memories and my mind that were sent back. My body stayed where it was. But in this case, we'd be

going back so far in time... It's not like I existed hundreds of years ago, so how does this work?"

"If you exist in the time and space you rewind to, then your current body disappears and your mind slides into your body of the past. This is a phenomenon that occurs no matter what other conditions exist. It is likely the work of a higher power acting to prevent the paradox of two 'you's from existing at the same time—or so our kingdom concluded." There, Nyanyan paused for a breath. "However, if you don't exist in the space-time destination you're rewinding to, said paradox is a nonissue. In that instance, both your physical and mental beings would travel to the past together."

"Cool. That means getting back won't be a problem."

I crossed my arms and began pondering how we would go about doing this, but Hibiki took the opportunity to step forward.

"You mentioned a method to break the curse earlier. What would that be?"

"As I said, the only one who can do so is the true king of Atlantis. I am merely an ethereal being, and more importantly, I did not officially ascend the throne. And so, if you wish to lift the curse on that girl, you must travel to the past, see that the coronation ceremony takes place, and then have the next king of Atlantis free her."

"All right, but just to be clear... You said the coordinates are set to *after* this Boboza guy completes the coup, right?"

"Yes."

"So then the deed is done. Now, what to do...?"

"Shall we put our heads together?"

"Yeah."

Hibiki and I included Nyanyan as we turned to the rest of the group and sorted out the situation. First we had Nyanyan's story. In order to get her a happy ending, we needed to return to Atlantis of the past and save her people from the sinking city within three days. Then there was Sherlyn's story. Saving it would also involve returning to the past, where we'd need to get either

Nyanyan or Boboza on the throne and have them remove the curse.

“Wait, if we make Boboza king, won’t Nyanyan be killed?”

“You needn’t worry about me.”

Or so Nyanyan said, but Hibiki immediately shook her head.

“No, this is a legitimate problem. This Boboza guy already succeeded in his coup, right? If we show up with Sherlyn wearing the crown, he’ll treat us like thieves and imprison us too.”

“Well, I *am* a phantom thief,” Sherlyn added jokingly.

“You... You just hush for now,” Hibiki said, rubbing her temples and sighing. “Anyway, this means we’ll need to factor in a rescue operation as well. We’ll need to get Nyanyan out of that dungeon for her to take the throne.”

We may end up leaving that matter to chance... but oh, well. The biggest issue now was...

“...”

Persuading Chirika, who had been sitting out of the discussions with a silent, sour look on her face this whole time. Well, maybe persuade wasn’t the right word. I was kind of dragging her around against her will, after all. And I had yet to do anything about saving her story, either. The reason I wanted to bring her along was mostly because I didn’t want her acting on her own. Of course, it was also because I didn’t want to get separated and ruin my chances of saving her story, but... would she accept that?

“No... I have to persuade her no matter what.”

R once told me what happened to the stories that were abandoned by the Namidare bloodline. Even if I didn’t abandon her story, the same thing would happen if the heroine gave up on me. Chirika and I had argued till we were blue in the face over just her coming to the ocean with us, so I was fully prepared for things to come to blows this time. Or swords.

“Hey, Chirika...”

“...”

Chirika opened a single eye and glared at me.

“I’m sure you heard everything, but we’re about to go to Atlantis of the past... and I’d like you to come along with us...”

“...”

Chirika remained silent for a long moment, then suddenly reached for her sword.

“?!”

The moment she did, I instinctively prepared myself to get cut in half, but she just used it to help herself stand... and walked right by me without any violence. She then went over and joined the group with everyone else.

“Huh... Are you sure?” I asked Chirika timidly.

“It’s not a matter of sure or unsure. Or did you mean to leave me here at the bottom of the sea? While I might question one or two coincidences, this is the third presented instance of these ‘stories’ of yours cropping up. I admit that I have doubted you, but I believe my eyes are beginning to open.”

“R-Really?”

If she was starting to have some faith in me, that was the best possible outcome. I heaved a sigh of relief.

“And even if the time period is wrong, returning to the past in some form is better than sitting around and waiting here in the future. If the Gold Yaksha really is a yokai, he should have existed long before the time period I was alive. Perhaps I might eliminate him before he ever lays his hands on Princess Izuko.”

“Then are you all in agreement?” Nyanyan asked when it seemed like the discussions were over.

“Yeah, for the most part. By the way, while I’m fine with going to the past, there *is* a way for us to get back, right?”

“Yes. Once you’re in the past, please visit the Great Library of the Heavens. There you’ll find the person who designed this divining altar, which provides us with the technology both for stitching space-time and for becoming ethereal. They’ll be able to help you.”

The Great Library of the Heavens? I guess it must be in a really high place?

“Okay, sounds good.”

“Now, please move your vehicle to the middle of the divining altar. The preparations will take some time, so I do apologize, but I’ll have to ask that you wait a moment.”

“How long is a moment?”

“About three hours.”

“That’s... a couple of moments, but sure. Yeah, we’ll wait.”

“Thank you.”

With that, Nyanyan passed through the wall of the submarine and disappeared. Shirley moved the submarine over to the center of the divining altar as ordered, and we went about killing time while preparations for going back in time were complete.



After we waited out the three hours, a strange light began filling the temple and pouring in the submarine’s windows.

“What is this light?” I asked.

“I don’t feel any magic coming from it... Maybe it’s just a part of the preparations for us to return to the past?” answered Satsuki.

There, Sherlyn walked up behind me and rather casually leaned on my shoulder.

“I gotta say, it’s hard to believe we’re actually going to the past... You really can’t predict what life’s going to throw at you, huh?”

“We came here to find a way to undo your curse... Sorry it’s turned into such a big ordeal.”

“What are you apologizing for? I had my whole life staked on a losing bet; you were the one who came along and dealt me some extra cards to play. Now I might actually stand a chance. So let me turn this around on you: are you really sure you’re willing to go to the past for me?”

“Of course I am. I’m the only one who can save everyone.”

“Heh, that’s right... You’re a hero,” Sherlyn said with a teasing smile and shrugged. “I was wondering what kind of guy could get the little-brother-obsessed Chelsea in such a tizzy, but go figure it’s someone like you.”

“...Huh?”

“Hey, Sherlyn! What lies are you telling Rekka?!”

Sherlyn slipped in a real humdinger there at the end, but the aforementioned Chelsea tore her way and started to interrogate her, so I never really got to the bottom of it. But it was just as well, I guess. That was about when Nyanyan stuck her head back inside the submarine and informed us she was ready.

“Everyone, the preparations are complete. I will now send you all to the past.”

“Got it,” I acknowledged. “Go ahead.”

“Very well. There is one last thing I forgot to mention, however. I cannot go with you, so I’m afraid you must proceed from here on your own.”

“Huh? Why?”

“...I’m sorry. It’s just not possible,” she said, a sad expression flashing across her face as she bowed her head deeply.

“Does that mean I can’t save you, Nyanyan?” I asked, somewhat staggered.

“Please do not worry... It may sound strange coming from someone who appears to be in such a desperate situation, but it is not me presently that you need to save. My past self is still imprisoned in the dungeon beneath this very temple. Should you wish to break the curse upon Sherlyn’s head, the Nyanyan of the past is who you truly need to save.”

Urgh... It was *this* Nyanyan whose story I’d gotten caught up in, so was it really okay to treat her and her past self as the same person? As far as their stories were concerned, I mean. Well, I guess they were ultimately in the same bind...

“Everyone... I wish you all the best.”

Nyanyan bowed her head once more in prayer and wished us luck as she

disappeared. Then, the light flowing in from the window grew stronger and stronger until it was all we could see.



Eventually, the light faded and the submarine suddenly tilted sideways with a loud clunking noise.

“Wh-What?!”

How could a submarine lose balance underwater? The answer, it turned out, was right outside the window...

“A-Are we on land?!”

I knew we were returning to the past and all, but shouldn’t we still be at the bottom of the ocean?

“Oh, duh...”

We were still in the same place, technically—the temple where the ritual had been performed. But we’d gone back to Atlantis of the past, which was still above water. That had to be it, probably... Right? Surely.

“Is everyone okay?!” I called out.

“S-Somehow...” Satsuki answered while rubbing her forehead, which she’d bumped against the floor.

It seemed several of the other girls had lost their balance when the submarine tilted too, but no one was really hurt.

“I think we’ve made it to Atlantis of the past and we’re still in the temple! Let’s get out of the sub and find somewhere to hide!”

I shouted orders to everyone while helping the girls up. In stark contrast to my panic, however, Tsumiki raised a lackadaisical question.

“What’s the big deal? Why are you in such a hurry?”

“If what Nyanyan said was true, today is the day Boboza succeeded in his coup d’état! What do you think he’s gonna do when intruders suddenly show up in the temple today of all days?”

There, there was a collective gasp in the room. It seemed we were all on the

same page now.

“Everybody ruuuuun!”

“Hey, don’t run off on your own, you hopeless angel!”

Though I was irritated at Rachelle running ahead of everyone at a time like this, thanks to her opening the submarine hatch, we were all able to exit the sub and get out into the temple quickly.

“Who the hell are you?!”

But just as I finished helping Satsuki, the last person out, down from the hatch, several soldier-looking types appeared at the divining altar.

“Hmph! I’ll handle these.”

“Corona, no! Don’t attack!” I shouted, preventing her from going straight into combat. “We’re gonna run instead!”

“Rekka, this way! I memorized the floor plan of the temple!”

“Nice, Shirley!”

She’d probably taken a good, long look at it while searching the interior of the temple with the submarine. So right now, I was rather grateful she was with us. Thanks to her, we were able to slip through the temple corridors this way and that at a breakneck pace.

“Hold it!”

Yet even so, there were five people after us. From what I could see at a glance, they were outfitted with simple armor with spears. It only stood to reason that they’d be suspicious of intruders, but their intense expressions and murderous auras told me they were probably part of the coup d’état.

“Young man, why can’t we attack them?” Corona asked as she ran along beside me, though she looked more confused than unhappy.

“We have to save the Atlantians later, for the sake of Nyanyan’s story. If we attack them now and generate bad blood, that’ll only make things harder down the line.”

Corona seemed to accept my reasoning, and she generously nodded.

“I can see you’ve considered the future thoroughly, young man.”

“But with a group this big, it’ll be hard to outrun them!” Hibiki yelled angrily, interrupting our conversation.

And she had a point. We had slow runners like Satsuki and Harissa with us and everything... Of all the times!

“Hibiki! A smoke screen!”

“Got it!”

Hibiki took a smoke bomb out of the pouch attached to her waist and slowed down to edge towards the back of the group before chucking it at the pursuers trailing behind us.

“What?!”

We could hear the soldiers’ confused shouting through the smoke, and we took the chance to turn the corner and run out of the temple.

“Wow, so this is Atlantis...”

The temple was built atop a hill overlooking the entirety of the city. I’d heard that the whole land of Atlantis had sunk, but I could see the shoreline from the top of the hill where we stood. Either the city was much smaller than I had expected, or the temple was just that close to the sea.

“Harissa, could you cast your invisibility magic on everyone?”

“Sure.”

After we were all invisible and therefore undetectable to our pursuers, we left the temple grounds with peace of mind through a deserted back alley that went downhill. Along the way, we stopped to take a breather.

“Thanks, Harissa. You can dismiss the spell now.”

“All right,” Harissa said with a casual swing of her staff.

Nothing changed from our perspective, but if anyone else had been here, they would have seen a dozen or so people suddenly appear out of thin air. But that wasn’t what any of us were concerned about right now. What really mattered was our escape, and thusly catching our breath. After a short break, I

took charge of the situation again.

“Even if we got off to a slightly rocky start, it seems we’ve at least made it to the past safely.”

“I got a glimpse of what the people we were chasing were wearing, which seemed to be quite similar to what Nyanyan had on. So it does indeed seem we’ve made it,” replied Hibiki, who was constantly paying attention to our surroundings.

I thought so too, but knowing whether or not we’d actually managed to travel to the past right now was of the utmost importance.

“Satsuki, could you see if we’re really in the past or not?”

“Sure.”

So to make absolutely sure, I decided to have Satsuki check using the Magic of Omniscience. But just as I asked her... I felt someone’s eyes on me. I turned around to see Sherlyn watching me and Satsuki dubiously.

“I heard you specialized in research magic, Satsuki, but this is some serious stuff... Not only can you look up items and places, but even the very concept of time?”

“Huh?!”

“What?!”

Her unexpected question made us harmonize in unease. Crap... Was time really that much more of a complex concept to research? I didn’t know, so I’d asked Satsuki for help so casually and she’d replied without thinking, but... The Magic of Omniscience was a secret Satsuki’s family had passed down for generations. It was so powerful that it would bring about disaster if used for evil purposes, which was why we’d always taken extreme caution about mentioning it in front of other people—including heroines and *especially* other mages—but to think someone would notice here... We’d just gotten careless. I figured I could either try and brush it off or confess the truth, but just as I was trying to decide which...

“You can tell her, Rekka. Sherlyn has no interest in pursuing magic, and she’s

not the type to sell others' secrets," Chelsea said with a well-intentioned smile.

I'd known Chelsea for quite a while now, and she said she'd been friends with Sherlyn for ages, so surely she was trustworthy too... And, honestly speaking, I didn't get any bad vibes from her. Sherlyn was easygoing but at the same time had a serious aura, and she genuinely seemed like an earnest person.

"Hey now, what are you guys going on about? Let me in on the deets," Sherlyn said in an overly exaggerated fashion, looking at the three of us with great interest.

She didn't seem any too pleased about being left out of an important conversation like this. I was 90 percent sure how I felt already, but it was Satsuki's secret to tell. I wasn't about to share it without her consent.

"Satsuki, are you okay with this?"

"Yeah. I trust your judgment, Rekka."

Once she agreed, I turned to face Sherlyn once more.

"The truth is..."

There, I explained the truth of Satsuki's heritage. It would have been a shocking revelation for anyone, much less a mage. But when Sherlyn heard it all...

"I see. I was wondering what could possibly be that much of a secret, but now I understand. I won't tell anyone, so are we all good now?" she replied rather casually.

"You're really hard to surprise, aren't you?"

"Huh? Well, that might be true. Let's say you weren't especially interested in a particular sport, but you suddenly got a chance to meet a super famous athlete that played it. Would you be excited, Rekka?"

"I mean, yeah, that'd be cool and all... But I guess I wouldn't really get too worked up about it."

"This is no different. I know Chelsea sort of said so earlier, but I cut ties with my family a long time ago. To me, magic is just a useful tool that helps me in my line of work, the same as my hat and cape."

“...”

Satsuki looked conflicted over her heirloom magic being compared to an outfit, but at least we'd gotten that out of the way now.

“Satsuki, can you tell yet?” I asked.

“Huh? Oh, yeah... there's no mistaking it. We're definitely 1,500 years in the past now. That time frame matches up with what I learned when I looked up what happened in Atlantis before we left, so I think we've successfully travelled back to where we meant to,” Satsuki reported back after regaining her composure.

Since Sherlyn and Chirika now both knew about the Magic of Omniscience, I figured it was probably safe to ask her something else that had been on my mind.

“So now that we've travelled back in time, what happens to what you can look up with your Omniscient Magic?”

“I don't really understand your question, Rekka,” Satsuki cautioned me like a school teacher would.

Okay, I guess that was poorly worded...

“Erm, well, the Akashic record details everything from the past to the present, right? So, if we're currently *in* the past, does that mean your knowledge is now limited?”

I had to choose my words carefully so she'd understand what I meant. Hopefully that would get things across...

“Hmm... I think I see what you're saying,” Satsuki said with an affirmative nod before explaining. “To start with the simple answer: yes. I can only access the Akashic record that presently exists. In other words, when I'm in the past, I can only access the Akashic record of the past.”

“I see...”

That made sense.

“Well, now that we've established that, next is...”

I was sort of turning things over in my head as I talked, but Chirika stopped me there.

“Wait,” she said.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

She then turned to look at Satsuki and said, “You over there... Satsuki, right?”

“Me?”

“You said you can look up anything, no? Does that mean you can also look up the location of the Gold Yaksha? If he still exists in this era, that is.”

“Well...”

“If you can, please do so forthwith. So long as you can tell me where he is, I shall cut him down before he can lay his filthy mitts on the princess!”

Chirika was imploring her, but Satsuki turned a troubled look my way.

“Chirika, let’s calm down first, shall we?”

“Rekka, why didn’t you mention this so-called magic of Satsuki’s earlier? If I’d known such a thing existed, then I could have set off to help the princess immediately.”

“I’m sorry for keeping it secret, but Satsuki’s magic isn’t something I can just tell people about. You can understand that, right?”

“Let’s just say that I do... But now that I already know about it, why would you insist on stopping me from benefiting from its use? You know good and well that I intend to stop the Gold Yaksha as soon as possible, and this may very well lead me to him.”

“Look, I know how you feel... But let’s not get too hasty here. Our first priority right now is to save Nyanyan from her imprisonment in the dungeon.”

That was the most urgent matter at hand. We had to do something about Atlantis in the next three days. The Gold Yaksha would simply have to wait until afterward, especially now that we were even further in the past than the era Chirika had come from.

“...”

But Chirika fell silent with a displeased expression upon hearing my answer. I knew she didn't like it, but she'd just have to deal with it for now. I'd make it up to her later.

"Let's start from the top. We're gonna sneak into the temple once again, then head for the dungeon. There, we'll rescue Nyanyan."

"I think that'd be for the best," agreed Hibiki.

However...

"If we have to sneak right back in there, why did we leave in the first place? Soldiers of that level are no match for me."

"Yeah! There hasn't been much carnage yet, so I'm getting hungry..."

Certain parties were none too happy with our plan.

"Listen, Chirika. Like I said before, we have to do things as peacefully as possible, okay?"

I decided to completely ignore Rachelle and instead address Chirika's concerns.

"Tch..."

It seemed like our previous exchange was still on her mind, as she clicked her tongue and turned away in a huff. What was this helpless feeling...?

"God, you remind me of how Hibiki used to act..."

"Wha?! What does that mean, Rekka?!"

"Oh, I don't mean anything bad by it. It's just that this blatant hostility kinda stings in a familiar way..."

Tsumiki and Fam had also been rather reluctant in the beginning, but in Chirika's case, there was an especially tall wall between us. It was getting a little exhausting.

"I-I don't think I treated you this coldly, though..."

Huh? Hibiki was mumbling to herself, but why did she look so teary-eyed?



“Boy howdy, it’s been a while since I heard one of the heroines complain about you like that,” said typical R, sitting cross-legged in the air as she observed all this in a disinterested fashion.

She looked like she was ready for a nap, but unfortunately, we didn’t have any time to relax. Even if Chirika and Rachelle were unhappy about it, the story we were in the middle of wouldn’t progress until we saved Nyanyan.

“Anyway! Harissa and I are going to go rescue Nyanyan. Everyone else should wait here and remain as quiet as possible.”

“Hold it. If you’re going to save Nyanyan, take me with you.”

When I brought up plans for the rescue operation, Sherlyn lifted the brim of her hat and asserted her desire to participate.

“You want to go too, Sherlyn?”

“I’m a phantom thief, you know? Prison breaks are a little specialty of mine... Though I’ve personally never been caught before,” she said with a teasing wink. “My magic is pretty useful. Nabbing keys and whatnot will be a piece of cake for me. Really, it’d be a good deal to have me with you.”

“Yeah?”

Was she talking about her magic? I wanted to know more, but we were suddenly interrupted by a commotion up ahead.

“What was that?”

I was worried our pursuers had discovered us, but that didn’t seem to be the case. I had Harissa cast her invisibility spell on me before I snuck down the alleyway and peered out into the street.

“Thataway!”

“Don’t let the target out of your sights!”

The soldiers were clearly after someone. I started to get nervous again, but...

“The princess escaped!”

After hearing that, I had a much better idea of what was going on.

“Corona, Harissa! And... you too, Rachelle! Follow me!”

“Aww, what about me?” Iris complained.

But there was no time. I’d have to explain later.

“Harissa, cast your invisibility spell on everyone. Corona, you carry Harissa. And Rachelle, you carry me. Then we’ll save Nyanyan from the skies! If anything happens, Satsuki and Hibiki will lead the rest of you to safety. We’ll meet up... somewhere!”

“Don’t drop the ball right at the end like that! You saw the shoreline from the top of the hill, right? Let’s meet there. All you’ll have to do is make it to the coast. Satsuki’s magic will lead us the rest of the way!”

I agreed to Hibiki’s revision of the plan, and Harissa then promptly cast her spell on everyone. I helped Corona get Harissa over her right shoulder, then waved Rachelle closer.

“Hurry! We have to save Nyanyan from the soldiers chasing her!”

“Awww... But I’m so hungry that I don’t have any energy left.”

“Argh, jeez! I’ll do anything you want later, so just make it quick!”

“Oh? You’ll do *anything* I want? That’s what you said, right? Yippee! I’ll do my best!”

“Huh? Ah, wait—”

I was just about to backpedal when she grabbed me by the sides and flew off. In a panic, I grabbed her arms in return so that I wouldn’t fall. I couldn’t escape the feeling that I’d just made a grave mistake... But either way, Nyanyan was more important right now.

“Rachelle, follow those soldiers!”

“Okaaay!”

Rachelle flapped her wings vigorously and picked up the pace.

“Waaah! I’m gonna fall!”

“Hold on tight.”

Corona, carrying Harissa, used her magic to keep up with us. As we followed the soldiers from the air, we watched them split up and veer off the main road down winding backstreets and alleyways.

“Hmm, the buildings are all clumped together. It’s hard to see anything from up here. You realize it’ll be tough to find her before the soldiers do, don’t you?” said Rachelle.

“That’s fine. Rather than looking, just listen out for any commotion.”

“Why’s that?”

“Ethereal Nyanyan didn’t appear to be particularly athletic. I doubt she’ll be able to run for very long.”

“So in other words, we’re not trying to find Nyanyan before the soldiers... just get to her before the soldiers can take her away?”

“That’s right.”

I shouted back to Corona to let her know the same, and we all strained our ears to listen out for the soldiers shouting.

“Young man, I heard one of them say they found something,” Corona said, pointing ahead about a kilometer.

I guess she wasn’t a Demon King for nothing. Her physical abilities were all insanely high spec.

“Let’s go!”

We then quickly flew in the direction Corona pointed, and it didn’t take long before we could hear the sound of a girl and several men shouting.

“Unhand me!”

We arrived just in time to see what looked like Nyanyan being seized by the soldiers.

“That girl’s the spitting image of the Nyanyan we saw at the temple. There’s no mistaking it,” I said.

“What are we gonna do now? There’re so many soldiers,” fretted Rachelle.

“Well, there’s a reason I asked Corona and Harissa to come along. I have a

plan.”

I called them over and let them know what I had in mind.

“Hm, well, that should be fine. Leave it to me.”

“I’ll do my best!”

“I’m counting on you two. They might not be able to see you, but try not to hurt them too much, okay?”

“I understand,” Corona agreed with a nod.

After that, I watched things play out on the streets below as we waited for the right time to swoop in.

“Come on! On your feet!”

One of the soldiers grabbed Nyanyan by the arm, forcibly pulling her up before pushing her forward to get her walking.

“Now, Harissa!”

“Ealim Nekram!”

At my signal, Harissa cast her invisibility spell on Nyanyan.

“Wha?!”

“Where did she go?!”

The soldiers all began to panic the moment Nyanyan vanished. Or at least, that’s what it looked like. In reality, she was still surrounded on all sides, so...

“This’d be so much easier if I could use wind magic like Satsuki...”

Corona used a weakened form of her dark magic to blow away the soldiers encircling Nyanyan.

“Uwah!”

“Kyah!”

They were all knocked into the walls of surrounding houses, collapsing into a heap. For at least the time being, they were out of commission.

“Huh? What?”

Meanwhile, Nyanyan looked around in flabbergasted surprise. Corona then landed on the ground right in front of her, and because people with Harissa's invisibility spell cast on them could still see each other, she jumped back with a start.

"Wh-Who might you be?"

"Just come with me."

"H-Huh? Kyah!"

She grabbed a flustered Nyanyan with her free left arm and then took off into the skies again.

"All right, let's make our way to the shore where Hibiki and the others are waiting," I said.

And so we left behind the dazed and confused soldiers as we headed for the coast.



After rescuing Nyanyan and meeting up with Hibiki and the others, we hid behind some boulders to stay out of view.

"Um... Wh-Who are you?"

Nyanyan was shaking like a leaf after being suddenly kidnapped and carried all this way. She was clad in some rather expensive clothes and had several capped jars hanging around her waist. They clinked together noisily with every step she tried to take backwards.

"Um..."

She seemed to be afraid of us. But that was unavoidable, I guess. As far as she knew, this was our first time meeting. It was a little strange, but I figured introductions were as good of a place to start as any.

"I'm Rekka Namidare. What about you?"

"I am... Nyanyan Atlantia. Are you all foreigners? Your outfits are... ever so strange. Did you save me just now?"

"Well, yeah, I guess we did."

Hearing my answer, Nyanyan heaved a big sigh of relief. She was clearly drained of strength, and let her shackled hands drop in front of her with a noisy clank.

“Those shackles... Corona, can you break them?”

“An attack that precise would be impossible unless you don’t mind me taking a little off the top in the process.”

“I have a knife, but it’d take me a hot minute to get those off,” Hibiki offered with a troubled expression.

“Hahh... Allow me.”

There, Chirika drew her katana with a sigh and stepped forward.

“Wh-What are you doing?!”

The dull gleam of her blade made Nyanyan draw back nervously.

“Hold still.”

Chirika paid her no mind, however...

Snap!

And sliced through the shackles with one swing.

“Uwah... hahh...”

Though she was frightened at first, once Nyanyan saw her hands were now free, she once more sighed in relief. She took a moment to calm down, then smiled brightly.

“Good job, you lot. I don’t know who you are or where you came from, but you did well rescuing a damsel—no, a princess in distress. A most commendable deed.”

“Y-Yeah?”

In that moment, I’m pretty sure we were all thinking the same thing: “Huh?” Something about this Nyanyan was definitely different...

“Now, first and foremost, don’t you have any water? I haven’t had a thing to drink since yesterday. I’m positively parched.”

Once she knew for sure that she was safe, she lazily slumped against the bolder and began fanning herself. There, I took the opportunity to gesture everyone else to gather around for an impromptu meeting.

“So, uh, what’s happening?” I asked.

“She’s nothing like the last time we met. If anything, she seems kind of spoiled... Like Iris,” suggested Satsuki.

“Hey, what’s that supposed to mean? Are you saying I’m spoiled?” demanded Iris.

“D-Don’t fight...” Harissa tried to mediate.

“Did she eat something strange?” asked Tsumiki.

“Why would that make her personality change? If that were the case, then the Nyanyan we met in the sunken temple would have been just as spoiled, no?” refuted Hibiki.

“Moreover, didn’t the other Nyanyan say that she was imprisoned in a dungeon? How was this one able to escape?” asked Shirley, her head cocked to the side.

True, that was a little curious...

“Hey, Nyanyan...”

“Do you need something? Also, I’ll have you know it’s rude to address a princess that way. But in my infinite generosity, I’ll forgive you just this once.”

“Th-Thanks...?”

The difference between the polite Nyanyan we met at the bottom of the ocean and this one was so night-and-day that I hardly had any idea how to react.

“So? What is it?”

“It’s just... you were captured, right? How did you escape?”

“Oh, that. They were interrogating me in the dungeon when some intruders appeared in the temple. That distracted the soldiers, so I took the chance to flee.”

Said “intruders” were probably us.

“Okay, so because we showed up in the past, the circumstances of Nyanyan’s story are already starting to change.”

I could understand at least that much, but that still didn’t explain the discrepancy in her personality.

“I see...”

“Hm? What’s up, Chelsea?”

“That’s it, isn’t it? The reason why this girl’s so different.” Chelsea twiddled her thumbs a moment as she put her thoughts together. “In other words, she was so humble and polite before *because* Atlantis sunk, you know?”

“What? Seriously?”

“Seriously. Think about it. If your hometown was suddenly destroyed and you spent over a millennium alone, how do you think you’d be?”

“Huh...”

When she put it that way, it made sense. She was a spoiled princess who had a change of heart (?) after losing everything... Was that it?

“Yoohoo! Rekka, was it? What’s all this about? Why are you muttering about coming to the past and the destruction of the kingdom?”

Nyanyan seemed to be rather upset about being left out of the conversation and indignantly puffed out her cheeks as she glared at me.

“Erm, the truth is...”

There, I explained to her that we’d come from the future to save Atlantis from sinking in three days’ time. But when Nyanyan heard this all, she said...

“Are you crazy?”

And that was exactly how she looked at me—like I was crazy. While I couldn’t really blame her considering the situation, it was frustrating since we’d never get anywhere if we couldn’t get her to take the threat of Atlantis sinking seriously. As such, I continued to try and persuade her.

“Don’t you people have technology to turn ethereal and return the past and

stuff? Is it really that hard to believe that I came from the future?"

"What?! How do you know that?! That's a secret of the royal family!"

"That's not the point!"

Her surprise wasn't unwarranted, but it was a little misplaced. So, once again, I tried to tell her about the impending doom of Atlantis... but she still refused to listen to me.

"I've got it! You must be spies from a foreign kingdom!"

If anything, she started to doubt us even more.

"I'm telling you... The Nyanyan of the future is the one who requested we come back and help you. If anyone should know what happens to Atlantis, it would be her, right? But she couldn't save the kingdom by herself, so she asked us for help. Do you understand?" I started to feel like I was just repeating myself. It was exhausting. "Seriously, why don't you believe us? Technically, you yourself were the one that asked us for help. Shouldn't you at least believe us a little...?"

"That's exactly the problem!"

"Huh?"

"I would never do such a thing!"

Huh?

"The technology to return to the past takes an equal number of years off your life, you know? So if you lot travelled back 1,500 years, there wouldn't even be a shred of an ethereal life form left! You wouldn't even be able to be reborn in the circle of life! Something that scary... There's no way I would ever do that!"

What? It takes... life?

"Wait a second! What's this about taking years off your life?"

"It's exactly what it sounds like."

Don't tell me that was why Nyanyan said she couldn't return to the past with us...

"Wait. Nyanyan was already like a ghost... How could she use up her life in

that form?”

“Rekka... You heard her say she’d used a ritual to preserve the life from her physical body. That means she was alive in some capacity, even in that ethereal state.”

“Hibiki...”

“The circle of life part is probably something similar to samsara. Since they had the technology to remove and preserve ‘ether,’ their religion probably believed that was the most concrete form of life there was,” Hibiki continued mumbling to herself as though thinking out loud.

Her hands were tightly holding her arms where she had them folded. I could tell her gears were really turning... Honestly, I felt the same way as I gritted my teeth and looked up into the overly blue sky.

“Why would Nyanyan do such a thing...?”

“It was all probably because she was willing to sacrifice herself for her wish, don’t you think?” asked Hibiki.

I looked back down and my gaze met her serious eyes.

“It’s true that the Nyanyan we met may have used up her life, but that doesn’t mean her story is over. Saving her story will end up saving her, too.” There, Hibiki glanced over towards the boulder Nyanyan was standing in front of. “Am I wrong, Rekka?”

“No... You’re exactly right.”

My shock hadn’t completely faded, but I suppressed it as I turned to Nyanyan myself.

“I don’t really get what you’re saying, and I still don’t believe that this kingdom will sink... But to sum it all up, you’re here to save me, right?”

“Yeah, you can think of it that way for now.”

“Then I shall welcome you with open arms. Make sure you work hard for my sake. Start by punishing that foolish uncle of mine for starting this dreaded coup d’état. I have high expectations of you,” Nyanyan said with a smile.

“...”

I stealthily shot a look R's way.

“It seems like this Nyanyan's story isn't about saving Atlantis, but doing something about the coup d'état instead. Regardless, she's most definitely a heroine.”

Apparently, the direction of the story changed to suit the wishes of the heroine herself. For the Nyanyan here and now, the most important issue to address was probably her uncle's coup. That was a hairy enough situation as it was, and I could certainly see how she'd need a hero. But just because she wanted to thwart the coup didn't change the fact that Atlantis was going to sink in three days. And in that sense, what I had to do and what I came here to save hadn't changed. Now I just had to do something about the coup on top of all that...

With newfound resolution, I clenched my hands into determined fists.



A little while later... Actually, not much time had passed at all, but every second felt like its own little eternity when we were racing against the clock. The whole city was going to sink in three days, and we had to retake the throne from usurpers and get Nyanyan crowned before all that. If we didn't, there would be no way to break the curse on Sherlyn. Plus, if we actually got Nyanyan on the throne, she'd surely be of use to us when it came time to save the Atlantians.

As for the crown, when Nyanyan first spotted Sherlyn wearing it, she immediately accused us of being thieving spies and her uncle's henchmen. We managed to calm her down by telling her that we'd stolen it from her uncle so we could bring it to her... Sherlyn had just accidentally ended up wearing it.

“So, that being the case, we want you to take the throne so we can save our friend too.”

“Hmm... Well, I suppose if you were on my uncle's side, you could have just made him the king and removed the curse that way. Very well. I'll believe you. As long as you save me, I don't care whether you're really spies or not,” said

Nyanyan.

“Okay, well, we’ve only just arrived in this kingdom and don’t know much about the situation. Could you fill us in?”

“I suppose. Let’s see...”

Based on what Nyanyan told us, things had started five days ago when the previous king—her father—passed away in his old age. Her uncle—Boboza—was the king’s younger brother and had had his eye on the throne for a long time, but only showed his true colors after his brother’s death. Nyanyan, who’d never expected such treachery, was caught completely off guard and was easily captured in the coup.

“Oh? You stood against his rule and all he did was imprison you?” Corona asked in a dubious tone.

““All he did’? You mean...”

“This Boboza man was trying to usurp the throne, right? Why wouldn’t he kill the princess on the spot? I can’t imagine there being a reason to keep her alive.”

A reason to keep her alive...? Maybe there was something, so I asked Nyanyan about it.

“My uncle wanted to make me give up the details about how to return to the past, a secret only shared with the true ruler of Atlantis. Without that knowledge and the crown, it’s pretty much impossible to be accepted as the king of Atlantis by either the council or the people.”

According to Nyanyan, a significant portion of Atlantis’s prosperity was attributable to their ability to return to the past. For example, if they were conducting experiments on the development of a new technology and something went wrong, they could infinitely go back in time and repeat the whole process with those mistakes in mind—essentially writing off all their failures for successes. Her father had returned to the past for the sake of medical advancements a little too often, however, which had unnaturally advanced his age.

“Everyone said my father was a splendid king...” Nyanyan said with a forlorn

expression. She fell silent for a while, but eventually raised her head again.

“Anyway, that’s how it is.”

“Thanks, I think I’ve got the gist of it now. It sounds like they’d be reluctant to kill you.”

On the other hand, we didn’t have any other trump cards to play. After seeing the soldiers chase Nyanyan like that, it seemed a large part of the kingdom—at least politically—had sided with Boboza. It would probably be best if we considered how thorough Boboza had been in laying the groundwork the coup. Now, as for us...

“Nyanyan.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Do you have any friends? You know, allies that might side with you?”

“Any allies?”

Nyanyan put a pensive hand to her chin. She hemmed and hawed out loud for a while. Then, finally...

“I don’t know.”

“You... don’t know?”

“I’m a princess. My father always praised me and everyone around me would bend to my beck and call. So if you ask me... I can’t really name anyone specifically.”

“Truly raised like a princess, I see,” Sherlyn said in a half-jesting, half-troubled way.

And it was something of a problem. If anyone and everyone had been Nyanyan’s ally simply because she was the princess, it would be impossible to tell where their real loyalties lay now.

“What will you do, young man? You said not to attack earlier, but I could just beat up this Boboza man and his henchmen. The best way to quell rebellion is with force, after all.”

Well, she wasn’t totally wrong. Boboza had been the first one to use force in

his power-hungry quest for the throne, so it wouldn't be totally inappropriate to respond in kind... But just then, Nyanyan seemed to think of something.

"Aha!"

"What's up?"

"We were talking this and that about sides a moment ago, but I know someone who just might prove to be a powerful ally."

"Who?" I asked.

Nyanyan then pointed directly up into the blue sky overhead and said...

"King Laputa!"

"Laputa? As in... the movie?"

Ha! I may not have known about Atlantis, but I definitely knew that one. Wait, that was real...?

"I know that might be the first thing you think of when you hear that name, Rekka, but Laputa is a reference to the flying island in *Gulliver's Travels*."

"Oh, okay." I nodded unthinkingly at the explanation Satsuki whispered in my ear, but then turned to look at her. "But wasn't *Gulliver's Travels* a work of fiction?"

"That's right."

Her unfaltering answer nearly bowled me over, but I guess that didn't really tell me what I needed to know. The legend of Atlantis had turned out to be true, so were we about to find out the same thing about Laputa? It didn't seem like Nyanyan had any reason to lie.

"All right, let's go meet the Laputian king. Where is he?"

"He's always in the Great Library of the Heavens in the flying city of Laputa."

"The Great Library of the Heavens?"

That was where Nyanyan had told us to go when we met her in the sunken temple. If I recalled correctly, she'd said someone there would know how to get us back to the future. I guess she must've meant the king of Laputa.

“Are we going to Laputa then, young man?”

“Yeah. It’s better than shedding any unnecessary blood. And besides, we need to visit this library in order to figure out how to get home anyway.” With that much settled, I turned back to Nyanyan. “So, how do you get to this Laputa place?”

“There are airships... but they’re probably being watched right now.”

Airships were exactly what they sounded like—boats that sailed through the skies. Boboza probably wanted to keep Nyanyan from fleeing the city, so it made perfect sense he’d be keeping an eye on them. That said, we’d definitely need one with this many people in our party. We had the option of flight magic, but it wasn’t really practical under the circumstances. We had more people who couldn’t fly than could, so it would mean multiple trips or leaving people behind.

“Okay, let’s go get us one of those airships. Can you show us where they are, Nyanyan?”

“Certainly. But first...”

“What is it?”

“Where’s my drink? I’ve been waiting ages.”

“...”

It seemed we’d have to get our hands on something else before the airship.

Okay, to be fair, staying hydrated is important. When I took a poll, it seemed the great escape had left all of our throats rather dry. So we took a small, stealthy detour to wet our whistles before sneaking our way to the airdock with Nyanyan’s guidance. Of course, everyone had Harissa’s invisibility magic cast on them.

“Those are the airships?” I asked.

“That’s right,” Nyanyan confirmed.

Said ships were small, dark gray vessels that could seat seven or eight people. They were also quite exquisite artifacts, with translucent roofs and delicate wings on either side of them.

“Is that iron? The color is kind of...”

“It might be made of bronze instead. Actually, that roof doesn’t really look like glass, either... Maybe it’s some kind of acrylic?” Satsuki was also looking at the airship with a rather dubious expression.

“Bronze, sure, but does acrylic even exist in this time period? That said, I guess producing anything like this would take some serious tech I hadn’t expected to see here...” Chelsea echoed, voicing her questions to no one in particular.

“Come to think of it, the floor of the temple was exceptionally smooth, but it was stone. Somehow, I get the feeling this is altogether different technology,” said Hibiki.

“Is that true, Nyanyan?” I asked. “Or is this thing Atlantian too?”

“Nope. The airships were gifted to us by the king of Laputa. Without them, we wouldn’t have a way to get there, after all.”

“I guess that makes sense,” I said with an accepting nod and looked around once more.

There were ten airships total, parked in two rows of five ships each. A long strip led up to the two ships in the front. It looked like they would accelerate down it like a runway before taking off.

“So, uh, how do these things work?” I asked.

“They’ll start if you set the key on the ignition stand,” Nyanyan explained.

“And where are the keys?”

“They’re stored in that facility.”

She was pointing over to a single-story building that wasn’t all that big. Maybe it was just an office or something? Anyway, the real problem was the guards surrounding it. There was a whole crowd of ’em... No, I should say there was a wall. The soldiers stood two or three deep and encircled the whole building.

“What do you think?” I asked, turning to Hibiki, who was observing the building through her binoculars.

“Looks tough. You used invisibility magic when you saved Nyanyan, right? We have to take into account they may have figured that out by now. From what I can see through the window, the inside is equally packed with guards. You’d be discovered the moment you busted in.”

Invisibility was great, but it simply meant that people couldn’t see us; it didn’t change the fact that we were there. If we got surrounded, even invisible, there would be no escape.

“It’d be over just like that...”

“If all we have to do is sneak onto the airships, then I think we could pull it off. Since they won’t move without the keys, the guards are all focused on watching the building.”

Now that she mentioned it, it certainly did look like the coast was clear over by the ships. That being the case, it’d be more efficient to have a small group go and steal the keys while everyone else boarded the ships and waited for us. That would simplify everything and reduce the risks we were running. Now, the only thing left to figure out was how to nab those keys...

“Come to think of it, Sherlyn...”

“Yes?”

“You mentioned earlier that stealing cell keys would be child’s play for you. Does the same go for airship keys?”

“Hmm... As long as I could spot them and there was at least a single window open in the building, then yes,” Sherlyn answered casually as she twirled a finger in the air.

“An open window, huh? Hibiki, you see any?”

“No... I see windows, but none open. They’re all shut tight.”

“Okay, what about the keys? Do you see those?”

“I don’t see anything particularly key-like, but I don’t know what an airship key looks like to begin with.”

Fair. Actually, Nyanyan *had* said we needed to “set the key on the ignition stand,” not “insert the key in the keyhole.” Maybe this was something unusual

after all.

“Nyanyan, can you come here a sec?”

“What?”

“Can you borrow Hibiki’s binoculars and tell me if you can spot the keys anywhere through one of the windows?”

“Binoculars? You mean that thing that girl was just holding up to her face? You’re going to let me borrow it?” Nyanyan asked, excitedly looking between me and the binoculars Hibiki was holding.

It seemed she’d been interested in them ever since Hibiki pulled them out. Hibiki didn’t object, and she graciously handed them over to Nyanyan, who immediately peered through the lenses like she’d seen Hibiki do.

“Ooh, this is amazing! You can see faraway things so clearly!”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s great! Just keep it down! Even if you’re invisible, people can still hear you... Now, see those keys anywhere?”

“Hmm... Oh, there they are. The second window from the right.”

“I’m gonna need a little more than that... What do they look like?”

“What? They’re the round balls sitting there next to the wall.”

“Balls?”

I wanted to see this for myself, so I asked Nyanyan to return the binoculars.

“Hrm...”

“Um, you kind of have to let go.”

She was rather reluctant to hand them over, but I eventually got them back safely and held them up to my eyes. I looked through the second window from the right... And sure enough, there were some round, stone-like objects neatly lined up against the wall just like she’d said.

“Take a look, Sherlyn.”

I handed the binoculars to her next.

“Let’s see... Oh, that’s them? There’s ten in total. That lines up with the

number of airships, so that seems to check out. I can steal them as long as the window's open."

That was the real problem now. Considering how well guarded the place was, it wasn't like we could just walk up to the building and crack one open. Really, I wanted to keep as much distance as possible and maybe come up with some way to get one of the guards to open a window...

"Hmph, my turn! I would like another turn!" Nyanyan tugged at Sherlyn's sleeve and whined as she fanned her face with a hand.

Looking around, she wasn't the only one fanning herself, either. Satsuki, Iris, and the others were all looking rather pink in the cheeks, and I found myself tugging at my collar without even realizing it.

"You know, it's pretty hot here..."

Maybe it was because we were out in the middle of the ocean, but the bright and beaming sun was pretty intense. You couldn't stay out in it for too long. Nyanyan and the other people of Atlantis were all pretty tan, but even they too... Huh. I just had an idea.

"Hey, can anyone here use magic that creates a bunch of fire? Or more specifically, heat?"

Everyone tilted their heads at my sudden question, but Satsuki then hesitantly raised her hand.

"I'm pretty sure I can find something like that with my Omniscient Magic, but why?"

"I might have a plan."

And I quickly explained it to everyone.



Satsuki, Sherlyn, Corona, and I hung back while everyone else stealthily boarded the two airships at the front of the line. There were a couple of guards patrolling the area, but Iris and Corona knocked them all out before they even had a chance to blow our cover. We then hid their bodies in the shadows for now.

“How’s it looking, Satsuki?” I asked.

“It should work just fine. Much like how a lens focuses light, I’ll be gathering the heat in the area and concentrating it on that building.”

“Got it. You ready to go too, Sherlyn?”

“You betcha.”

Sherlyn nodded as she continued to stare through the binoculars at the building, her gaze utterly fixed. Even without binoculars, my eyes were glued to that window too. And before too long...

“It’s open!” Satsuki cheered.

And it looked like she was right.

What we had done was extremely simple: we raised the temperature inside the building until one of the guards inside got hot enough to open a window. Atlantis was hot enough as it was, so turning up the heat on a closed-up building would sooner or later become too much to bear. Sooner, in this case.

“Sherlyn!”

“Leave it to me!”

With an energetic cheer and the binoculars still held up to her face, Sherlyn raised her free hand like a gun and pointed her index finger at the building.

“Mark!”

There, two small beams of light fired from the tip of her finger in rapid succession. Both sailed through the air and went right in the open window. Then...

“Steal!”

She then curled all her fingers together and drew her clenched fist closer like she was pulling in a rope. There was immediately a commotion coming from the building... and two strange spheres flying our way. They looked just like the airship keys Nyanyan had pointed out to me earlier.

“All right, got them!”

They flew right to Sherlyn like they were being sucked into her hands.

“Well? What do you think of my magic? I use Mark to lock on to a target and Steal to pull it towards me. Useful for a phantom thief, no?”

Sherlyn fiddled with the round keys in her hand like a magician, explaining her trick to us with a proud smile.

“Nice one, Sherlyn! Now, Satsuki, Corona, get us to the airships with your flight magic!”

“All right!”

“Understood.”

“Not so fast, Rekka. Don’t forget to take one of the keys.”

“Oh, right. Thanks.”

We’d have to take two airships, so it was important that we each had a key when we split up. I took one from Sherlyn and then flew over with Satsuki to the ships. Corona and Sherlyn followed behind us.

The soldiers who had been on guard spent a while running around like chickens with their heads cut off after what happened, but someone eventually realized that the keys being gone meant that the airships were being stolen. All the guards came pouring out of the building after that... Just about as I was boarding the airship on the right, and Corona and Sherlyn on the one on the left.

“Shirley, it’s all yours!”

“Leave it to me.”

As soon as I was on board, I tossed the key over to Shirley at the helm.

“Erm, I just need to place it here, right?”



Shirley placed the key into the rounded indentation on the ignition stand. It then suddenly came to life with a hum as the translucent roof and wings of the ship began flashing the colors of the rainbow. Then we heard a low tone, like the ship's systems had booted up or something.

“Okay, here we go!”

Shirley rolled the key in the stand forward, and the ship slid ahead as though to match its movements.

“Amazing... I don't sense any magic at all. I wonder how it's moving...” Satsuki looked around at the ship in wonderment.

Just to make sure, I looked up through the half-transparent roof to make sure the airship Sherlyn and the others were on had taken off safely too. Iris was in charge of piloting that one. As for the reason... It was simply because, like Shirley, she was used to driving a spaceship.

I mean, to be fair, none of us had ever helmed an airship before, but we all decided it would be best to leave the piloting to the people who had... you know... at least *some* piloting experience. For the record, even though she was familiar with the airships, Nyanyan was a princess and had always had someone to drive her around. She didn't know the first thing about flying one herself.

Anyway, the short of it is that this whole flying adventure was risky business. Takeoff was a little harrowing, but once we achieved liftoff, the ship ascended rather smoothly.

“I was a little worried considering how it looks, but it seems it can fly just as well as an airplane,” said Tsumiki.

She was sighing with relief just like I was, but perhaps that was premature. There were still eight ships in the airdock. The enemy could still catch up to us... Or rather, they might have if we hadn't taken countermeasures already. I glanced behind me to see that playing out exactly as I'd hoped.

The runway we'd just taken off from was shrouded in darkness that crept all the way back to the office building. There was no way anyone was taking off under these conditions.

“Looks like Corona did a good job.”

Part of my plan had been for her to use her signature dark magic to basically blackout the dock after we left. And it seemed to be working. With that all said and done, I would love to say it was time to take a breather... But we were just getting started. In spite of what lay ahead, however, I decided to at least enjoy the trip heavenward.

“So it’s off to meet the king of Laputa, huh?”

Chapter 3: The City in the Sky and the Land of Illusions

After successfully ditching our pursuers, we all looked down through the clouds and took in the sights of our fantastical journey through the sky.

“So to get to Laputa, we just have to head towards the red point on this map, right?” asked Shirley.

“Hom nom... That’s right,” Nyanyan answered as she munched on a complimentary airship cracker.

There was what appeared to be a map of the skies at the helm that displayed the current clouds and atmospheric conditions in addition to a red dot that marked our destination—Laputa.

“Radar in this era... That’s incredible. Actually, if this red dot is Laputa, then it appears to be moving... Will this airship have enough fuel or energy or what-have-you to get there?” Hibiki asked Nyanyan as she pointed to the moving red marker on the map.

“That won’t be a problem. Laputa and Atlantis are twin islands, after all.”

“Twin islands?”

“Yup. They always maintain the same distance between each other no matter what. If Laputa moves, then Atlantis moves with it. That’s what my father told me, anyway.”

“If Laputa moves... Atlantis moves too? Hold on. Does that mean Atlantis is drifting across the ocean?”

“That’s right. Didn’t you notice?” Nyanyan said, responding to Hibiki’s shock with casual indifference.

“...I see. Well, that’s one mystery solved.”

“Which mystery?” I asked, curious as to what she’d figured out.

“Remember how we discovered Atlantis sunk in the Pacific Ocean? The legend is originally from Europe, however, and says it sunk in the Atlantic. Just

think about the name.”

“Huh, yeah... That is strange.”

“But if the city is moving... I guess if the island is moving? Whatever. The important part is that if it’s drifting across the open sea, that explains how it got from one ocean to another. No wonder it was always so mysterious. If you saw it from land, it would look like any island... But then it wouldn’t be there the next day.”

Yeah, a moving island... I guess that really is the stuff of myths. There’s a kind of romance to the story.

Meanwhile, Shirley—who had been listening to us talk all this time—began tapping her index finger against her chin.

“But twin islands, huh? I wonder if there’s some kind of magnetic field that ties them together? Or is it more like a planetary orbit kind of relationship?”

She was completely immersed in her thoughts instead of flying the ship. Good thing it was smooth sailing. That said, not everyone found the moment to be peaceful.

“...”

“Hm?”

Chirika had been awfully quiet for a while now.

“...”

She was stock-still, clutching her katana to her chest and staring dead ahead.

“...Chirika?”

“Mgwuh?!”

When I called out to her, she jumped a little in her seat.

“Oh, it’s you... What is it?”

“Nothing. You just don’t look so good. Are you motion sick?”

“Sick? Certainly not. I haven’t been ailed with anything.”

“It’s not that kind of sickness, erm... Do you feel like you want to throw up or

anything?”

“No, but...” In a rare moment of nervousness for her, she looked out the window and said, shoulders shuddering, “It’s hard to believe a boat is flying through the sky. I keep waiting for the moment it falls.”

Come to think of it, they didn’t even have planes in the time period she was from. This had to be a completely new experience for her. It was perfectly naturally to be scared.

“Don’t worry. There’s nothing to be afraid of. Remember the television at my house? This is just another incredible, everyday part of life in the future. It won’t fall that easily.

“...When you say ‘that easily,’ you mean to imply that it *can* fall?”

“No, no, no! It’s not gonna fall at all! It’s totally fine! This is perfectly normal for humans in the future, so no biggie! Just pretend like you’re aboard a large boat!”

Really, there were airplane accidents too. And I didn’t know how safe these Laputian crafts really were. But I decided to leave all that out and tell a few white lies to reassure her.

“Hmph...”

I don’t know how much of what I said she really believed, but she saw how desperate I was and flashed a less high-strung smile.

“To think I’d be comforted by the likes of you... A samurai should never be cowardly. I need to reflect on my actions.”

With that, she closed her eyes and started to meditate. It looked like some of the tension in her shoulders was gone, so it seemed that even if I hadn’t made her feel any safer, I’d at least cheered her up a little.

“Wah!”

“Eep!”

Suddenly, Harissa and Tsumiki both exclaimed in surprise.

“Whoa!” I echoed them unthinkingly.

The wide open sky, which had only carried sunbeams and clouds so far, was suddenly filled with a gigantic floating island.

“I wonder if it’s active camouflage... The whole island is covered,” Shirley said, impressed by the view of it from the helm.

It really was an enormous island. I had wondered how big an island floating in the sky could be, but it was at least the size of a small mountain. It was pretty small to call a kingdom, honestly, but the impact of it floating in the sky made it seem so much bigger.

We brought the airships down at the edge of Laputa. Surprisingly, or perhaps mysteriously, the island itself was made of dirt and rock, and it had grasses and trees growing everywhere.

“The ground is solid and the trees seem real too.”

Other than the fact it was floating through the sky, everything seemed normal about Laputa.

“I pictured something more like a battleship or flying fortress, but this is pretty much literally an island in the sky...” Shirley muttered to herself as she looked around.

She’d been postulating about the scientific advancements of Laputa the entire time she was flying us up here in the airship. I can only imagine the questions she had. While we didn’t know what was powering the airships, they were otherwise comparable to a modern-day aircraft. Their helms were even equipped with a device that worked like radar. It could monitor weather conditions in real time like a weather station, but without all the equipment and setup. From the standpoint of this era, Laputa was using some seriously futuristic technology. And, actually, thinking of it that way, Shirley was right. A battleship or a floating fortress would have made a lot more sense than a flying mountain... but whatever.

“So, Nyanyan, where is this Great Library of the Heavens?”

“It’s at the center of the island. It won’t take any time at all to get there.”

“It won’t?”

If it was at the center of the island, that meant it'd be at the summit of the mountain before us. It was a two-or three-hour climb on foot, easy. I didn't see any convenient vehicles lying around for us to use, either. Actually, it didn't look like there was anything manmade at all. We'd even landed in a clearing, nothing like the paved stone surfaces of Atlantis.

"If the Great Library of the Heavens is at the top of the mountain, wouldn't it be quicker just to go the rest of the way by airship?" I asked.

"Of course not. Flying over the king of Laputa's head would be most disrespectful. Silly Rekka."

Nyanyan looked at me like she was disappointed... But there was no way I could have known that, right?

"Okay, well, walking up there is going to take a while. What's this supposed 'no time at all' transport method of yours?"

"This way."

Rather than answering my question, Nyanyan pointed to the start of a mountain path. It was maintained enough that it could fit three or four people abreast, but there wasn't anything else particularly remarkable about it.

"Stand here. There's a lot of you, so try to stay as close together as possible."

"Huh?"

Nyanyan gathered us at the base of the path with those vague instructions.

"Just what—?"

I was about to ask what she was doing, when....

"Here we go. Don't slip and fall."

Nyanyan raised her right hand and drew something in the air with her finger. Whether it was a character or just some kind of gesture, I wasn't sure, but...

"Uwah!"

"What? The ground is...?!"

It triggered something, and the ground began moving under us. We were now sliding up the mountain path.

“Wh-What is this?!”

It reminded me of how I used to use cardboard as a kid to slide down hills, only in reverse.

“Is it like an escalator? Except we’re the only thing moving...? The ground, trees, and everything else are all staying in place. I’m very curious as to how this works,” observed Shirley.

I said the ground was moving earlier, but Shirley was actually right. This was nothing like a moving sidewalk or conveyor belt. We were the ones moving along the path, and not the other way around. Not even the pebbles on the ground were disturbed as we slid by. Apparently, this mountain was only ostensibly all natural.

“I... I guess this will take us there in no time at all...”

Even if we were in constant fear of slipping and falling. Harissa had been clinging to my sleeve for a while now and showed no sign of letting go.

“Hm?”

Just then, I thought I caught a glimpse of someone in the mountains. We passed by so quickly, however, that I couldn’t even turn to get a second look in time. I just had to shrug my shoulders.

“I wonder what kind of guy this Laputian king has to be to make something like this...”

I’d probably find out once I reached the end of this completely automated mountain path. OR so I was hoping as I prayed that there were no curves on this sloped path.



Fortunately, it was a straight path and we all survived it, coming to a stop at the Great Library of the Heavens.

“Amazing. It’s become one with the mountain.”

I looked up at the entrance to the library in admiring wonder. If you’d told me the Great Library of the Heavens was a building, I could kind of see it. There were remnants of architecture here and there, but otherwise, it just looked like

the tip of a mountain.

“The library has trees growing on its outer wall.”

“Is it cover to thwart enemy attacks? No, there’s no one alive who could attack a floating island in this era, which means... Personal taste?” mused Hibiki.

“I heard the Great Library of the Heavens doubled as the king of Laputa’s residence, but this certainly doesn’t look like a castle...” added Satsuki.

Everyone else shared their opinion too, and it seemed we were all on the same page—this didn’t look like any library.

“So is it okay to just walk straight in?” I asked.

“Of course it’s okay. I’m here with you,” replied Nyanyan.

Somehow, that only made me worry more...

Nevertheless, we timidly followed after the fully confident Nyanyan as she walked straight through a door that I had completely missed.

“Whoa...”

I was surprised all over again once we got inside. The interior was decorated beautifully compared to the rugged exterior, and it was positively overflowing with books. There were mountains of them. No, a whole sea. One of my upperclassmen at school really loved books, but not even her vast collection could compare to this. All of these books wouldn’t even fit in a normal person’s house. Looking up at the atrium-styled floors, it was all bookshelves as far as the eye could see. With books almost literally stacked to the sky, I now understood why they called this place the Great Library of the Heavens.

“Umm... What’s that?”

But there was one other surprising sight in the library. They appeared to be employees bustling about busily, but no matter how I looked at them... They were just puppets moving on their own.

“Robots?!” several people, including me, exclaimed.

Unlike Shirley’s assistant, Garnet, these weren’t so delicately made that they could be mistaken for humans, which really only enhanced their robotic-ness.

“Are they some kind of marionette?”

Chirika, however, had no idea what robots were. Accordingly, she was a little less shocked than the rest of us. More so just... confused.

“They don’t seem to be bothered by us,” said Rain as she approached one of the puppets and patted it on the head.

“...”

It simply, silently, continued to work as if it hadn’t noticed.

“They don’t seem capable of autonomous thought like Garnet. They can only perform specific functions they’ve been preassigned,” Shirley analyzed.

Perhaps Laputa had these puppets working all over the place. Maybe one of them was what I saw on the mountain? It made me wonder...

“There are puppets, but no people?”

I strained my ears and listened, but I couldn’t hear footsteps, talking... anything. Was there really nothing but puppets here?

“Hmm? What are you lot standing around for? Let’s go and see the king already!”

Perhaps she was simply used to the sight, for Nyanyan showed no hint of surprise over the puppets as she bounded further into the library.

“Hey, don’t run ahead!”

We quickly followed after her, but...

“There’s no need... to hurry,” called a seemingly young but sage voice from above.

We all froze in our tracks. Then, a strange flying sphere fell down in front of us from overhead, coming to a stop right before it made contact with the floor. On top of it sat a little girl who looked younger than Harissa and Rain.

“King Laputa!” Nyanyan, all smiles, ran straight over to the girl when she saw her.

“You’ve brought along some interesting company, Nyanyan,” said the king in a rather emotionless voice as she stared our way. “Yes, what rare guests.

Welcome... to the Great Library of the Heavens. We would gladly... have you."

"Thank you..."

She was a child no matter how you looked at her, but I reflexively bowed my head in her inexplicably majestic presence.

"Um, are you really... Er, would you perhaps be the king of Laputa?"

"Indeed, we are. Does our appearance unsettle you?"

"Honestly, a little..."

"Every time our physical body reaches its limits, we create a new one and transfer our memories into it. That is how we have lived... for 300 years. Thus appearances... mean nothing to us."

"Th-Three hundred years...?"

"Cloning and memory transfer now? Honestly, what's with Laputa's technology?" Hibiki muttered with a groan.

This place was honestly just one surprise after another...

"There's one thing I'd like to ask, but is the reason this island floats the result of your technology too?" Shirley asked the king out of curiosity.

"No... it's not. The reason this island floats... is natural providence. The propulsive force to direct its path, however... was installed by us."

After the Laputian king responded flatly, she guided us further into the library with a staff in hand.

"You are the first guests... we've had in a while. Please make yourselves... at home. And if possible... bestow upon us knowledge we have yet to learn."



After we met, the king of Laputa led us to her private quarters.

"We don't get many visitors, you see... The reception hall has long since been demolished... and remodeled into a reference room. There is an audience chamber, but there are... no chairs there. Apologies... but you will have to settle for our room."

“Certainly not. We should be thanking you just for inviting us in,” I replied graciously as I looked around her room, which was lined with stacks of books just like I’d expected.

“No one’s asked yet, but I have to... Paper hasn’t been invented in this era, yet? And it looks like these books were printed, not hand-copied. Talk about out of place...”

“Ahaha, silly Chelsea,” teased Sherlyn. “If you want to talk about out of place, how about the robots with optical camouflage? Not to mention the king is riding on a flying sphere...”

“Come to think of it... Why is that foreigner wearing the royal crown of Atlantis and not Nyanyan?” asked the king as she studied the laughing Sherlyn carefully.

“Well, you see...”

There, I explained the whole situation to the king of Laputa.

“Hmm... Unexpected visitors from the future, huh?”

“These guys are a little strange in the head. All this talk about Atlantis sinking and stuff... Just ignore them.”

The king of Laputa appeared relatively unfazed by our story, but Nyanyan clearly still didn’t believe us.

“It’s true... The threat of Atlantis sinking cannot be taken lightly. We shall conduct... our own investigation.”

“Thank you.”

“Not at all... If Atlantis were to sink, it would involve Laputa too, after all.”

“...?”

It would? Like, she’d be sad to lose her only neighbors? Come to think of it... This raises a question. Atlantis was gone in the time period we’d come from, but what about Laputa? I’d never seen or read anything about a flying island, which had to mean...

“Gosh, that’s enough of Rekka’s weird chitchat for now! What’s really

important here is dealing with Uncle Boboza's coup d'état!" Nyanyan, who had been impatiently waiting through our whole conversation, yelled as she waved her arms. She then reached out and grabbed the king's arm. "King Laputa, I'm begging you. Please save me. There's nothing I can do by myself..."

"Hmm..." The king fell pensively silent for a spell. "That... would be a little difficult."

"What?!" Nyanyan whined in shock.

The king's expression remained unchanged, but she muttered, "Bothersome..."

"What is that supposed to mean?!"

"It was... a joke."

Huh? Was the king actually a joker? Her still-emotionless expression was starting to unnerve me a little...

"However... it's true that forcibly interfering with the politics of Atlantis is... undesirable."

"Politics? Boboza is only doing this out of his lust for power, you know?"

"Violence... can be a part of politics, too. While Boboza's methods may not be pleasant... the real problem is you, Nyanyan."

"M-Me?!" she nearly shrieked at the sudden accusation.

"Nyanyan... Firstly, you are too young. You are still a little unreliable to serve... as a ruler."

"Th-That's... But if you would help me and—!"

"Why should I?"

"Wh-What...?"

Being questioned so seriously, Nyanyan was at a loss for words.

"K-King Laputa, you've always doted on me since I was little, haven't you? So why would you betray me now?!"

"This is no... betrayal. It is true that we are friends, but that will still be true..."

even if you do not become the ruler of Atlantis.”

“But why shouldn’t I be?!”

“Boboza has ambition... He is a capable politician. He also excels at the art... of seizing people’s hearts. As the younger brother of the previous king, he also has the ability to use the space-time stitching technology... should he be so taught. So, Nyanyan... are you or are you not more fit to rule than he is?”

“Grr...”

“Do not growl at us. If Boboza were to aim for your life, then we would save you. However, we do not feel it necessary to interfere in Atlantis’s domestic affairs... in order to see you crowned.”

“B-But...!”

“Let us ask you this.” Her expression never even wavering, the king leaned in and peered into Nyanyan’s eyes. “Nyanyan... Once you become king, what will you do? Or are you simply under... the mistaken impression that you get to be king... just because you’re the princess?”

“...”

“Were we... a little too harsh?”

Looking down at the dumbstruck Nyanyan, the Laputian king apologized without looking particularly affected.

“W-Wait a minute, please,” I said, speaking up after the two of them had fallen silent.

“What is it?” the king asked, turning to look at me in a rather mechanical fashion.



“Didn’t you just say yourself that Nyanyan is young? We have no way of knowing what she’ll be like as a ruler, right?”

“Young or not, a ruler is a ruler. A kingdom will fall apart... without a competent king.”

“But until she becomes an adult, the people around her can help her rule.”

“You...” Nyanyan murmured, rubbing her teary eyes as she looked up at me.

“Hmm...” the king mumbled, looking up into the air. “There is truth in your words... Yet there is still no reason for us to interfere directly.”

Dang. That was probably my best shot at persuading her, but it was still a no-go, huh? I was just about ready to give up all hope, when...

“Let us see... If you people can afford our assistance... we might consider helping out... a little.”

“Really?!” I leaned forward in excitement and asked.

The king nodded.

“Well? What’s the price?”

“We wish for a surprise,” the king replied plainly.

“You want to be surprised?”

“Indeed. We would like to be shown something that will surprise us... but it need not be a physical item,” she said before spreading her arms wide. “This is the Great Library of the Heavens. Laputa’s *raison d’être* is to go around the world and collect knowledge.”

“You collect knowledge?”

I’d believe it after seeing all the books in this place...

“But a surprise is the price for your assistance?”

“After living for 300 years, it has become more difficult to find new and fresh knowledge. As a result... we have gradually lost our emotions and passion. We can barely remember how to make expressions anymore. That is why... we’d like you to show us something... that might move our heart?”

“Why was that last part in question form?”

Whatever. At least her request was simple enough. Now we just had to come up with something to surprise her.

“Okay, let’s start with the basics,” I said as I dug through my pocket and pulled out my phone.

“What’s that?”

“A cellphone.”

Surely the guaranteed answer was whipping out technology from the future. I’d seen how Chirika reacted to the television.

“A tool? What does it do?”

“It has various functions, but its main purpose is to talk people who are far away.”

“Communication at a distance?”

The king cocked her head to the side for a moment before pulling a cord from the sphere she was sitting on and holding it up to her mouth.

“YS-8, suspend operations and come to our location,” she ordered in a quiet voice.

A few moments later, a single librarian puppet entered the room. It walked by everyone, right up to the king, and then halted.

“We are familiar with communication at a distance... It is nothing new to us.”

“Ugh...”

“Why are you groaning?”

I guess I had to concede that the king already had technology that outclassed anything I personally had access to. A mere cellphone wasn’t gonna cut it.

“Iris, Shirley... You too, Rain. Do you guys have anything that might surprise the king?” I asked, turning to the three aliens in our group.

“I don’t... What about you two?” Rain said with a shake of her head, looking to the other two girls.

“I may or I may not. Who’s to say what might surprise her?” mused Shirley.

“Ooh, ooh! Rekka, I have a laser gun!” volunteered Iris.

“Laser?” the king inquired.

“Maybe you’d call it optical weaponry. See, it works like this...”

“Wait, Iris! No! Don’t fire it in here!”

And so we went around, pulling out one thing after another that we thought might surprise the king. But...

“We’ve seen... this before.”

“We know... this one.”

“We could... make that.”

Her responses were all pretty much the same. This was turning out to be tougher than expected... Even when we showed her items from the future, she’d either made something similar herself already or grasped the concept and mechanics so quickly that it hardly passed as a surprise. And that went doubly so for magic. She apparently could see the flow of mana better than most people, allowing her to see through Satsuki and Harissa’s magic while they were chanting their spells. There was no way we were gonna surprise her like that.

“All right... Then how about this?”

I gestured with my arm, directing the king’s gaze to Corona.

“Hm?”

She placed her fingers against her chin as she looked at Corona, transformed into full-on Demon King mode with horns, tail, and all.

“A demon, huh? How rare... The demon and human worlds should have separated a fairly long time ago... actually.”

“Wait, you know about demons too?!”

“I have read of them, yes...”

Seriously? That must mean they used to exist in this world too. I mean, I guess that wasn’t all that unbelievable considering we had vampires and whatnot. But

I was sure meeting a Demon King in person would be enough to surprise her...

“Sorry I couldn’t live up to your expectations.”

“No, it wasn’t your fault, Corona.” I consoled a disappointed Corona, then made my next move. “Next is a double whammy! Here we have... an angel and a mermaid together! How’s that?!”

“We’re familiar with these also.”

“Bwaaah!”

Shot down instantly...

“If she didn’t know about angels, wouldn’t she have been surprised the moment I got here anyway? It’s not like I hide my halo and wings!” commented the ever-carefree Rachelle.

“It was a little embarrassing bringing out my tail on land...” said Rain, slightly blushing for some reason.

“Wait... a minute.”

There, the king approached the two of them atop the flying sphere she rode. Just as I was wondering what she was up to, she suddenly started to pet Rachelle’s wings and Rain’s tail together.

“Oooh!”

“Eek!”

I just had to look the other way...

“What are you doing all of a sudden? Three seconds of contact, max!”

“Um, my tail is a lot more sensitive on land, so please don’t touch it...”

“Forgive us... Although we know of you, we have never touched the real thing before, so...” After apologizing, the king returned to her original position.

“Well? What will... you show us next?”

“Hmm...”

I crossed my arms and sat down, thinking about what to do next. Sherlyn then walked over without warning and mussed my hair.

“Hey!”

“Rekka, you’ve been frowning for a while now,” she said, curling her lips into a grin.

“I just don’t know how we can surprise the king... She knows everything.”

“Oh? You’re mistaken there.”

“Huh?”

Sherlyn’s unexpected rebuttal made me reflexively look up at her.

“She said it didn’t have to be a physical object or some kind of knowledge, right? She just said she wanted a surprise.”

Yeah, that’s right... At some point, I’d gotten fixated on the knowledge part and narrowed my field of vision without realizing it.

“You know, the secret to surprising people with magic tricks is to show them something that makes them wonder how you did it.”

“...”

The trick is in making them wonder how it’s done... Thinking about it carefully, the reason why we couldn’t surprise the king of Laputa was because she already understood everything we were trying to show her. But Sherlyn was right. Magic tricks were all about the delivery. The result could be simple enough; surprise was in how it happened. And once my mind was on surprises, I couldn’t help recalling *my* biggest surprise of the day. Something that had nearly made my heart leap out of my chest...

“That’s right. With her...”

I excitedly leaped to my feet, fueled by a new idea about how to surprise the king.



“Hm? What is this?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Just stand right there.”

I got the king to come down from her sphere and stand in front of her desk.

“Okay, so... First, look at this.”

“An iron box?”

“Put something you don’t mind being cut into it.”

“Something that can be cut?”

“Yeah. Put whatever it is in the iron box, and Chirika will cut it from over there.”

I gestured over towards Chirika, who was being awfully standoffish... I wished she’d be a little more sociable.

“We can see what looks like some type of sword at her waist... Judging from her outfit, she’s Oriental. And you say she’ll cut the iron box?” the king asked, observing Chirika.

“No, she’s only going to cut what’s *inside* the box. And from a distance, at that.”

“...Oh?”

She sounded the slightest bit interested this time.

“YS-8, bring us the item on the third shelf of that case over there.”

She then ordered the puppet that came in earlier to retrieve what looked like a bottle from one of the many bookcases in the room.

“Is that a ship in a bottle?” I asked.

“We made it out of... boredom,” said the king as she placed it inside the iron box.

“Are you sure?” I asked. “Doesn’t it take a while to make one of those?”

“It’s fine. There will... be more boredom.”

Well, if she insisted... I closed the lid of the box and placed it on the desk behind the king.

“Okay, Chirika. We’re all ready to go.”

“I don’t appreciate you treating my swordcraft like some kind of street performance...”

Chirika let out a heavy sigh as she readied her blade. Then a serious look flashed in her eyes, and...

Clink!

The next thing I knew, her katana was back in its sheath.

"...Huh? What? Is it over?"

"Yeah."

The stance she'd taken was different from what she'd used at my house, but I guess the move had variations.

"She cut it already?" the king asked, blasé as could be.

Wow, what a reaction... or lack thereof.

"Let's open it up and see!" I excitedly cracked open the box and took out the bottle, but... "Huh? It's not cut?"

At first glance, the ship inside the bottle was exactly as it was before.

"Chirika, did you, uh... fail?"

"Fool. Look closer. At the flag pole."

"The flag pole... Wait, you mean the mast?"

I looked down again, and sure enough...

"Only the flag at the top is cut!"

"It is a beautifully made piece, after all. I thought the flag should be easy enough to fix."

"Wait, you actually aimed for it?"

"Listen here. The Silkworm Slash is a technique that can cut a silkworm in its cocoon. Just how big do you think a silkworm is?" Chirika replied in exasperation.

Now that she mentioned it, a silkworm was only about as big as my thumb. But this was even more incredible than that. She'd cut a tiny piece of a delicate model that was in an iron box behind a person. The Silkworm Slash was really as amazing and precise as Rosalind had said... Wait, I wasn't supposed to be the

one who was surprised here! The real question was what the king thought of it.

“Just now, that wasn’t magic... How did you do it?”

She was peering intently into the bottle, her cheeks faintly flushed and her eyes sparkling. She then patiently scoured the iron box to make sure there wasn’t some kind of trick to it. Naturally, she didn’t find any evidence of the sort.

“Girl... Just now, what did you do?”

“I’m no mere ‘girl.’ I’m a samurai. That was a secret technique of my sword school—a human skill. Don’t lump me together with sorcerers and demons.”

“A human skill? We see...”

The king carefully turned over the bottle in her hands again before calling over YS-8.

“Take this to the safe... Carefully.”

YS-8 didn’t nod or anything, but it carefully carried the ship in a bottle away as instructed.

“Well, what do you think, Your Majesty?”

“Indeed... You have shown us something good,” she said, climbing back on her sphere to be eye level with me. “Going around the world, constantly gathering knowledge... Sometimes it makes us worry that perhaps... there’s nothing left that could surprise us.”

I guess that was an understandable worry considering she’d amassed all kinds of knowledge that shouldn’t even be available for 1,500 years to come. The invention of the telephone and airplane were historical turning points for mankind, but she was completely disinterested by them. And she was up here all alone, literally flying over the heads of people baffled by the very idea of flight. Yeah, I could understand her worries.

“But as it turns out... We sometimes forget how much of a surprise people can be. Perhaps we have underestimated people... in a way. You have indeed shown us something good.”

“Then...”

I looked at her hopefully. She nodded...

“As you requested, I shall...”

“Wait a minute.”

But the samurai suddenly interjected.

“Chirika?” I asked, turning to look at her.

“King of these lands, you say you travel the world gathering knowledge, correct?”

“Indeed.”

“Then do you know anything about a yokai called the Gold Yaksha?” Chirika inquired, eying the king with a sharp gaze.

“Hmm...” The king pulled out the cord she’d used to summon the librarian puppet earlier. “Search command: Gold Yaksha.”

YS-8 was on standby after delivering the ship in a bottle to the safe, but swiftly left the room when it received new orders. The librarian puppets of the Great Library of the Heavens were probably all searching for information on the Gold Yaksha right now.

“Chirika... What’s gotten into you all of a sudden?” I asked timidly, feeling strangely uneasy.

She turned to me with a furious glare and replied, “I am no longer relying on you.”

What? Don’t tell me...

Just as I was about to ask, several librarian puppets waddled into the king’s quarters with enough books to cause an avalanche. They walked in front of her one by one, showing her the various tomes they’d collected. They opened to specific pages, and the king passed her eyes over each of them in rapid succession. The whole process took less than a minute.

“You wish to know about the man called... the Gold Yaksha, correct?”

Wait, man? The fact that she’d called him a man instead of a yokai caught my attention for a second, but Chirika didn’t seem to pay it any mind.

“I want to know his location. Can you find it?”

“We cannot determine his precise location... in real time. But we do know where... he used to live.”

“Tell me immediately!”

“Wait a second, Chirika!” I forced my way between the two of them. “Don’t tell me you’re planning on going after the Gold Yaksha right now? I still...”

“Silence. I will wait no longer.”

“But you said you’d trust me.”

“That was when I had no other leads and no choice but to trust you. But now that I’m learning about the Gold Yaksha, I will prioritize this clue. Move.” Chirika thrust me out of the way and drew closer to the Laputian king. “Now, tell me. Where is his hometown? I may find out about him if I go there.”

“If you wish to go... we will lend you one of our airships. Laputa just so happens... to be near Japan right now.”

“I would be most grateful.”

“YS-1 will take care of the navigation and piloting for you.”

The king gave orders to another of her robots, YS-1, which waddled off towards the door. Chirika followed after it.

“Wait, Chirika! Your Majesty, why did you tell her that?!”

“The samurai was the one who surprised us... Should she not be the one to receive the reward?”

“Ugh...”

I couldn’t say anything to that, so instead of trying to argue, I went after Chirika. Everyone else followed suit... Including Nyanyan, who was desperately trying to keep up with our running pace.

“Hey, what are we suddenly running for? Where are you going?” she somehow managed to ask while panting for breath.

“Iris, could you carry Nyanyan?” I asked.

“Eeeh... All right.”

With a somewhat annoyed look, Iris scooped up Nyanyan and kept running without missing a beat.

“This is much easier, I admit, but could you not carry my like baggage?”

“If you complain, I’ll drop you.”

“Eep! Th-This is fine...” When Iris glared at her, Nyanyan shrank back in her arms. “M-More importantly, where are we going? We still haven’t gotten King Laputa’s word that she’ll do something about my uncle.”

“Sorry... At this rate, Chirika’s going to go off on her own. We have to follow her,” I explained.

“Whaaat?! Then what about me?!” Nyanyan wailed.

“Not that I wanna take her side or anything, but why *do* you wanna go after the samurai chick so badly? She was always complaining and being mean to you, so I say let her go,” Iris said with a furrowed brow.

“No, I can’t. This is my fault for only focusing on what was right in front of me and continuing to put her off. I don’t blame her for ditching me.”

Considering Chirika’s personality, she’d done well to hang in there this long. It was my bad for not following through and helping her out after I said I would. Somewhere along the way, I may have naively thought she’d have to wait for me because there wasn’t anything she could do without me... If her story had come my way, that meant she’d need me to help solve it.

“Anyway, I can’t let Chirika go off alone. We got the king to agree, so we can come back and ask her for help properly later.”

But for right now, I had to prioritize chasing Chirika. I figured she’d be headed for the airships we all came in on, but it didn’t seem like it. Was YS-1 leading her somewhere? Oh, they just went through a door! What was on the other side?

“...W-Wait, an elevator?!”

When we got to the door, I realized what it was and couldn’t help stammering a little. Just how many centuries ahead of its time was this island?! Judging from the display, Chirika was headed down.

“Argh! We’re getting on the next one! Satsuki, she’s probably headed for an airship hangar! Please look up what floor that’s on for me!”

I asked her to take care of that part while I repeatedly jabbed the button to summon the other elevator to this floor. I’d gotten so impatient that I made a terrible oversight...

“So cramped!”

“I can’t breathe! Jeez!”

“I... I’m gonna suffocate...”

“I’m... being... crushed!”

“Someone’s feathers are in my face!”

“It’s slipping! My skirt is slipping, so stop shoving me!”

Pandemonium... Packing so many people into a single elevator was hell. I’d honestly forgotten how big our group was. Fortunately (?), there was no weight limit alarm. Normally the king was the only one using the elevators, so there probably wasn’t a need for that... But at least we were moving. I tried not to imagine the possibility of the cables snapping at any moment.

“Wow, Rekka. Enjoying the perks?”

The only one who was perfectly comfortable in the packed elevator was R, who was grinning as she whispered to me squished between everyone.

“What?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Right now, all these heroines are pressed up against you head to toe... I can think of men who’d die to be in your position right now—literally.”

Ugh, she just had to go and remind me! I was trying not to think about it, too! Things were awkward enough as it was. I didn’t need a rush of blood to the head making it worse... Please. Please just let us get there soon.

All told, it probably took less than two minutes to reach the bottom, but each second felt like an hour.

“Bwah!”

When the doors finally opened, we all spilled out of the car desperate for fresh air. It seemed we'd made it to the hangar.

"Wait, where's Chirika?!"

I raised my head and looked around in a panic. The hangar was a large room filled with airships lined up in rows. One of them—one at the front—was clanking about like it was ready for takeoff. We'd never make it in time to stop it, and it would be impossible to stop it once it was in the air.

"I guess we don't have a choice. We gotta follow that airship. Satsuki, can you find out where she's going?"

I knew I was asking a lot for her to use her Omniscient Magic repeatedly like this, but we just couldn't afford to lose Chirika now. While Satsuki was looking it up, we split up into two groups again to pile into the airships.

"Huh...?"

As we prepared for takeoff, I heard a surprised peep from Satsuki.

"What's wrong? Did you figure out where Chirika's headed?"

"Um, well, yes."

"Where?"

Satsuki hesitated for a moment, then replied with a bewildered expression...

"Chirika's destination... is Shangri-La."



Shangri-La—the ultimate paradise. An ideal utopia sequestered away from the rest of the world.

"First Atlantis, then Laputa, and now Shangri-La? What's happening?"

"It's like a gallery of the legendary lands of the earth, sea, and sky. To think we'd be going on a one-day trip through places that any archaeologist or historian would die just to see... Guess that's Rekka for you."

Hibiki and Satsuki looked at me as they sighed in exasperation, but I wasn't sure why. As far as I was concerned, I was already in over my head with Chirika's timeslip... It wasn't like I wanted all of these stories to overlap like this.

I really didn't get it.

"Man, the heroines that follow you around really have it tough..."

And as usual, R was there to hit me right where it hurt. It wasn't like she was wrong, though... I'd been causing a lot of trouble for everyone lately. It's almost time for the school festival, so I'll just have to make it up to them then.

But for now, I had to pull myself up by my bootstraps. We'd just reached Shangri-La.

"I can't see anything..."

I mean, I said we'd reached it, but there was only dense undergrowth as far as the eye could see. There was no sign of any kind of paradise.

"If you go through those bushes, there'll be an invisible entrance. Since it's a magical land, it's not like a normal door or anything," Satsuki explained.

"I see. Then let's get going."

I took the lead and pushed through the undergrowth, stomping down the grass and snapping shrub branches to make it easier for the girls following me to get through. After proceeding like that for a while, the undergrowth ended abruptly and opened up into a flat dirt road.

"Did we enter Shangri-La?"

I looked around curiously as I waited for everyone to catch up. Shangri-La was often described as a dreamlike paradise, but it certainly didn't look fantastical. Really, it just looked like an old-fashioned countryside village. The roads weren't paved with gold or anything extravagant like that. The houses didn't even look that fancy, either. There were sprawling farms and fields, giving it the feel of a hard-working community. It was grand in its own way, but relaxed and peaceful... I guess that's how Shangri-La rolls, but what was with this sense of unease?

"Uh..."

There were no signs of life here. The only person in Laputa had been the king, but there wasn't a soul around here. It was like a ghost town. I could see a dozen or so houses, but they were shut up tight. And on top of that, it was kind

of... It was just sort of an odd impression, but it seemed like there was a dark cloud hanging over this peaceful village.

“Hmm...”

“Isn’t it kind of... somber?”

It seemed the girls had the same impression. Several of them started rubbing their chins and looking around too. But while we were hesitating to proceed, the door to one of the houses opened up and Chirika stepped out.

“Chirika!” I yelled her name as I ran to her.

Despite her indignant expression, Chirika waited for me without running off this time.

“So you came too, did you? I thought you were going to ignore me in favor of saving that girl.”

“As if I could do that. Moreover...” I paused a moment to catch my breath, then lowered my head.

“Wh-What are you doing?!”

“I’m sorry. I made light of your situation and took advantage of your patience. But please... Please don’t run off by yourself anymore. You can be pissed off at me all you want, just give me one more chance to help you.”

With my head bowed low, I apologized to Chirika as sincerely as I could. I’d intended to the moment I ran into her, and here we were. My eyes stayed glued to the ground as I waited for her response, praying she would forgive me. Eventually, I heard a scoffing snort.

“Come now, a man shouldn’t bow his head so readily.”

I tentatively looked up to see Chirika’s disgusted expression.

“I truly didn’t expect you to come after me... Why do you care so much? There are others that require your assistance as well,” Chirika asked, glancing over at Nyanyan and Sherlyn.

“This may sound arrogant, but I’m the only one that can save your story, Chirika. Like I told you before, that’s how my bloodline works, so I’d never

abandon a heroine who came to me. I made that promise to myself.”

“...I’d call that greed rather than arrogance. You’re attempting to save everything yourself. It seems like you’re an even greater fool than I had thought,” Chirika said before laughing for the first time today.

Did... Did that mean she forgave me? Maybe?

“She might have just been sulking because her story was placed on the back burner, you know?” R said as she somersaulted in the air, but I took it as her usual nonsense. If that were true, not only would it make me feel guilty, it’d actually be pretty cute.

Now, back to the main subject...

“Anyway, we’ll get back to Laputa later. Since we’re here now, we might as well try and find out something about the Gold Yaksha. So... time to gather information, I guess?”

I was ready to get right into it, but...

“Give up. It’s pointless.”

Chirika stopped me for some reason.

“Why?”

When I asked that, her expression turned rather sour.

“There’s a plague.”



Chirika had arrived in Shangri-La before us, and she had used that time to go around asking the residents here about the Gold Yaksha. Or at least that was her plan, but when she barged into the first house... she found its owner lying in bed looking more dead than alive.

“I counted 15 houses in the vicinity, and of the 14 I’ve visited, they’re all in the same condition. At this rate, it won’t be long before their entire village is wiped out. I heard that Shangri-La was a land unfettered by death, but it seems the rumors are just rumors.”

It was indeed starting to seem like Shangri-La was far from the paradise we’d

heard it was.

“Okay, well, let’s go to the remaining house for now. We can plan our next move once we’ve exhausted that possibility.”

And so we made our way to the one house Chirika hadn’t already visited yet.

“Hold on a minute...”

“Nyanyan?”

Just as I was about to open the door, Nyanyan tugged on my sleeve and stopped me.

“There’s a sick person inside, right? Everyone should drink some of this.”

She took one of the bottles hanging at her waist and opened it before lifting it to my mouth. A medicinal scent wafted up from the inside.

“Is this some kind of medicine?”

“Atlantis has been developing its medicinal technology for a long time now. Don’t you remember me telling you about that? If you drink this, it’ll prevent you from breathing in viruses. So drink up.”

“So it has a virucidal effect on the air itself? Without the need for a mask?” Hibiki readily accepted the bottle from Nyanyan with an approving, impressed nod.

“Thank you, Nyanyan.”

“I-It’s no big deal...”

When I thanked her, Nyanyan hurriedly turned away. Was she feeling shy? Anyway, after we all took a sip of the medicine, I opened the door.

“Hahh... Hahh...”

I found a young woman lying in bed who seemed to be in a lot of pain, which, according to Chirika, was par for the course here. Just when had Shangri-La fallen into such a terrible state...? To stay on the safe side, only me, Chirika, and the medically knowledgeable Nyanyan actually entered the house.

“Hahh... Hahh...”

Even when we walked over to her, the woman's hoarse panting continued.

"The people I found in the other houses were in the same condition. Even when I called to them and shook them, they didn't react," explained Chirika, frowning bitterly.

"...Are you all right?"

Despite what Chirika had said, I couldn't help kneeling beside the pained woman to see if there was anything I could do. And slowly, she faintly opened her eyes. All three of us were surprised to see it. To be honest, I'd already half given up hope after hearing about the sad state of things here.

"Wh... Who...?" the woman asked in a husky voice.

"Nyanyan, could you take a look at her?"

"P-Probably."

Nyanyan nodded without much confidence, but she swapped positions to kneel down next to the woman. Then, after whispering something quietly in the woman's ear, she held her ear up to the woman's mouth as she murmured her reply. They went through several questions this way, and Nyanyan reached for another one of the bottles at her waist.

"Rekka, please lift up her head."

"Got it."

I kneeled beside the woman's pillow and gently held up her head, tilting it back as Nyanyan directed. She carefully brought the bottle she'd opened to the woman's lips and helped her drink it little by little.

"It's only a temporary measure, but this should help alleviate her pain... I think."

"Can you heal her?"

"I'd have to return to the kingdom and ask the medical team for more details, but it should be possible... I think."

"That's good news."

I let out a little sigh of relief for now. We then waited patiently, and the

woman's breathing and expression both eventually relaxed.

"I'm not sure who you are, but thank you..."

She eventually recovered enough to sit up and thank Nyanyan properly, albeit with a hoarse voice.

"No, I didn't do anything special..."

"We're lucky to have a princess from a kingdom that specializes in medicine like you around, Nyanyan," I added.

"I'm telling you, it's no big deal... These are just some of the basics I learned while my father was still alive."

Nyanyan seemed to be embarrassed by all the praise, but she also looked quite content with herself. We then went around to each house and got all the residents of Shangri-La to drink some of Nyanyan's medicine before returning to the woman's house to hear her story.

"And so... what brings you children here to Shangri-La?"

I looked over at Chirika, who gave me a small nod and took over from here.

"We are after only one thing. Do you know of a yokai called the Gold Yaksha?"



“The Gold Yaksha?”

The woman cocked her head to the side, then pensively looked up. It seemed nothing came to mind, however, as she furrowed her brow and shook her head.

“I’m sorry. It may be something that has slipped my mind in my old age, but that name does not ring any bells.”

“Old age...? Miss, you don’t look any older than 20.”

“We of Shangri-La do not age or die. We will simply bear this illness, ailing for all eternity...”

“What...?”

I gasped reflexively. Just the thought of a fate like that sent chills down my spine... Chirika, meanwhile, wasn’t ready to give it up. Unhappy with the answer she’d gotten, she pressed the woman for more information.

“Miss, my sources say the Gold Yaksha hails from the land of Shangri-La. Do you really know nothing of him?”

“What? He hails from here...? That can’t be. No one would ever try to leave here...” the woman declared, paling suddenly.

“What’s wrong?” asked Chirika.

“To my knowledge, there has only been one person to leave Shangri-La. Perhaps he is this Gold Yaksha you are seeking.”

“Who is he?”

Chirika leaned forward, drawing nearer to the woman. Then, reluctantly, she said..

“My husband.”

“Your husband...?”

“Yes,” the woman replied in a quiet voice. “The plague first swept through Shangri-La nearly a hundred years ago. The residents of the village fell one after another, and by the time I collapsed, my husband was the only one who hadn’t yet taken ill. In desperation, he left for the outside world in search of a cure for everyone.”

Chirika's expression wavered for a moment when she heard the woman's story.

"...Is that all? That's the reason you think your husband may be the Gold Yaksha?"

The woman hung her head for a while, unable to answer... Or perhaps just hesitant to. I think the only reason she spoke up anyway was probably because she felt indebted to us for saving her.

"My husband returned to Shangri-La just the once, saying that he was unable to obtain medicine in the outside world without this thing called 'money.' So in order to get money and buy the medicine... my husband took the Mask of Greed with him."

"What's the Mask of Greed?"

"A demon mask that was sealed in the village storehouse. It's a cursed artifact that amplifies someone's greed and grants them power proportionate to that greed."

"A cursed artifact, huh...?" Sherlyn, who just so happened to be cursed herself, muttered quietly as she tapped a finger against the crown on her head.

"It is said that the Mask of Greed will eventually consume the wearer, transforming them into a demon themselves. I can only assume that my husband thought money was unobtainable without the power of the mask. He was always timid at heart..."

When she was done sharing her story with us, the woman closed her weary eyes once more.

"What do you think, Hibiki?" I asked.

"The residents in an isolated place like this are probably the epitome of socially inept, yeah. But considering the time period... Maybe the medicine was just that expensive or he was fooled into overpaying for it. Maybe a bit of both. At any rate, I doubt the sum was so astronomically high that it couldn't have been obtained through ordinary means."

If he thought he needed a dangerous power to make money, what was he

doing? The first thing that came to mind was robbery. According to Chirika's story, the Gold Yaksha kidnapped the princess and demanded a ransom, which very well may have been how this woman's husband decided to make his money. However...

"Chirika, right now we're 1,500 years in the past, but you..."

"You said I was from 500 years in the past from your world, meaning we're a thousand years hence from that now."

A thousand years, huh? No matter how expensive the medicine was, there was no way it would take that long to save up for it. Which had to mean...

"If he still hadn't obtained it after a thousand years, then it may simply be that the right medicine or treatment wasn't available in this era," offered Hibiki.

"That's probably it," I agreed.

Most likely, he was swallowed by the power of the Mask of Greed while he was waiting, which eventually transformed him into the Gold Yaksha as he came to be known.

"Tch..."

I could hear Chirika click her tongue quietly next to me. When I turned to look at her, she looked pained and was gritting her teeth. This unexpected origin story of the Gold Yaksha seemed to have stirred something within her. The same was true for me; I would have regretted attacking him thinking he was just a regular demon. But there was still hope.

"With Atlantis's highly advanced medical technology, surely we can cure the plague of Shangri-La! As long as that happens, then the Gold Yaksha won't need to go on a quest for money."

If we could stop the Gold Yaksha in this era, then Princess Izuko wouldn't be kidnapped a thousand years from now—which would resolve Chirika's story! I could finally see a light at the end of the tunnel, though there was still the matter of the coup in Atlantis. I couldn't afford to make the same mistake twice, so we'd have to progress both stories at once moving forward now.

"Hibiki, please take Nyanyan and the others back to Laputa first. There, could

you work together with the Laputian king to come up with a way to stop Boboza's coup d'état?"

It was a massive favor, and one I could only ask Hibiki—heir to the Banjo bloodline who'd resolved probably even more stories than me. With her in charge, I knew everything would come together seamlessly.

"Leave it to me," she said with a determined nod.

"I'm counting on you."

With a fistbump as a farewell, we then split up and went about our respective plans.



Hibiki and the others ferried the people of Shangri-La to Laputa so they could be transported to Atlantis for treatment later. The medical journals of Atlantis had been donated to the Great Library of the Heavens, however, so Nyanyan said she'd do her best in the meantime. She was rather spoiled and selfish when we first met her here in the past, but she was a lot more cooperative and motivated now. When I asked her why, she answered...

"Because hearing someone thank me was a lot nicer than I expected."

As a princess, Nyanyan had probably always had someone to do every little thing for her. She'd never really had the chance to do things for anyone else. Maybe that was why she wanted to be on the giving rather than receiving end for a change. I decided to leave the people of Shangri-La and Atlantis to her and Hibiki for now—I had things I had to do myself.

I asked Satsuki to search for the Gold Yaksha's current location and then headed there by the airship. Six of the girls came along with me: Satsuki, Iris, Shirley, Corona, Chirika, and Sherlyn. Satsuki was the navigator, Shirley was the pilot, and the other five of us prepared to face off against the Gold Yaksha. I'd brought the most competent fighters with me in case things took a turn for the worse, but I was really hoping it wouldn't come to that.

"There it is. Inside that forest," announced Satsuki.

"Got it. I'll land as close as I can," replied Shirley.

She brought the airship down on a road next to the forest that Satsuki pointed out. The Gold Yaksha was apparently hiding out in a cave here, stealing money and goods from passersby.

“Satsuki and Shirley, you two wait here,” I instructed.

“All right. Be careful...” Satsuki hesitantly agreed.

“You’re not that strong either, Rekka, so don’t get in over your head, okay? Don’t be afraid to use what I gave you,” implored Shirley.

She’d given me several items for self-defense, mostly traps. But after I agreed to use them and we said our goodbyes for now, Iris, Corona, Chirika, Sherlyn and I made our way into the forest.

“Hey, Rekka, why did you bring Sherlyn along?” Iris whispered in my ear as we walked through the trees.

Sherlyn was a mage and a phantom thief who had fought all kinds of battles on her own, but it was true that her Mark and Steal skills weren’t particularly useful in combat.

“If possible, I want to save the Gold Yaksha... that woman’s husband. I think we might need Sherlyn’s power for that. Not to mention she wanted to come along.”

“Hmm...”

Iris glanced over at Sherlyn, who waved when she realized it.

“Well, as long as you have a plan, Rekka, it should be fine.”

“I sure hope so.”

“Yeah. I always rely on you, so you can lean on me anytime too, okay?” Iris offered with a smile.

I honestly felt like I was always the one relying on her, so it was really sweet of her to say. I was genuinely grateful to have her around, as an ally and as a friend.

“Rekka, have you no propriety? Flirting at a time like this...” Chirika muttered with a disgusted look.

“I-I wasn’t flirting...”

That seriously hadn’t been my intention, but if it looked that way to her... then I was really embarrassed.

“Young man, I see it.”

Just then, Corona ducked behind a tree and let us know she had a visual. We all took the hint and jumped into the underbrush before poking our heads out. And there, just as Satsuki had described it, was the cave. We continued to lie in wait, and a figure eventually emerged from the mouth of the cave.

“That’s...” I stammered.

“His face is a little different, but there’s no mistaking it. That’s the Gold Yaksha,” Chirika said with a nod.

The horned Gold Yaksha was easily two heads taller than me. He was definitely large and muscular, carrying a heavy hatchet with one hand.

“I don’t recall him having a hatchet on the mountain...” Chirika muttered under her breath as she placed a hand on her katana.

“Hold it.”

“What is it, Rekka? Don’t tell me you would like to take the lead in battle.”

“No, no. It’s just that if he’s using a tool, then I’d guess he still has some semblance of humanity. We might be able to reason with him, so let’s try talking before fighting.”

“...Fine. But the instant talking fails, I will have no mercy on him.”

I gave a modest nod of agreement before stepping out from the trees.

“Crap!”

The bushes around me rustled noisily as I moved. Naturally, the Gold Yaksha heard it right away and turned to me with his hatchet at the ready.

“Please wait! I came here at the request of your wife!” I shouted, holding both my hands up to show I meant no harm.

“My... wife...?”

“That’s right! If you’re looking for medicine to save the plague in your hometown, then...”

I was ecstatic to see his reaction, and I took another step forward to try and negotiate, but...

“...GRAAH!”

That was apparently reckless. The Gold Yaksha suddenly swung his hatchet, aiming to bring it down right on top of me.

“Fool!”

“Urk!”

Just as I was about to get my block knocked off, Chirika thrust me out of the way and met the hatchet with the sturdy blade of her unsheathed katana. The hatchet was deflected with a metallic clang, and Chirika took a few steps back to put some distance between herself and the Gold Yaksha.

“Rekka!”

“Young man!”

“Rekka, are you okay?!”

Iris, Corona, and Sherlyn all jumped out from cover to help me get back on my feet.

“Medicine... Need money... for... med...” the Gold Yaksha mumbled, clutching at his head in pain as he faced off against Chirika.

“Young man, shall I?” Corona asked, her dark magic already swirling at her hands.

“Do it, Corona! I won’t forgive him for hurting Rekka!” shouted Iris.

“Not you too, Iris! And no, Corona! Just wait!” I shouted too, trying to keep them both from jumping into the fray.

“Why?! That guy tried to hurt you! Besides, hasn’t he completely turned into a monster already?”

“No... Not yet.”

He had attacked me, but I saw the way he reacted before that. It was still too early to give up!

“Money... Gold... I need gold!” The Gold Yaksha roared and launched another attack, this time swinging his hatchet at Chirika.

“!”

Chirika evaded the swing and flanked the Gold Yaksha, cutting the back of his hand.

“Gwargh!”

Blood spilled from his split skin, and he shouted out in pain.

“He must be using the hatchet because his skin isn’t hardened like steel yet... The thousand-year gap means he’s not as strong right now. Or as fast. His movements are slow.”

Chirika analyzed her opponent calmly as she readjusted her grip on her katana. They glared at each other from where they stood before us, one to our left and the other to the right.

“Grrrugh...”

The Gold Yaksha glared at Chirika as he growled, while her eyes were calm but full of vigor. In my eyes, that alone was reflective of their difference in power. From what I had heard before, Chirika and the Gold Yaksha were evenly matched during their fated battle on the mountain. So if he was weaker than her now, surely victory was at hand... And that was exactly why I had to stop her.

“Tch!”

I took off running about the same time the two of them made their moves.

“Graaargh!”

The Gold Yaksha swung his hatchet, relying on power alone to try and take out Chirika. It was an obvious play, and one that was easily counterable by a master swordsman like her.

“...”

But she hesitated.

“Chirika!”

I jump tackled her from the side and knocked her to the ground. Immediately behind us, I heard a hatchet slashing through thin air. The sound alone sent cold sweat dripping down my back.

“Wh-What are you doing?!”

“If you don’t want to do it, then stop!”

“...!”

“You were evenly matched before, but now you’re the stronger one, right? But you didn’t go for the kill just now! It’s because you hesitated, isn’t it?!”

There was no way the best Chirika could do was land a tiny scratch on the back of his hand when he’d left himself wide open. Something was strange.

“Rekka!”

“Huh?”

Iris launched a jump kick at the Gold Yaksha, who was taking aim at me and Chirika still on the ground. His huge frame went flying into a tree trunk with a loud crash.

“Sorry! Please buy me some time!”

“I’m generally terrible at holding back... but I’ll try.”

Corona shifted into Demon King mode and went to help Iris with my unreasonable request. Using the time they were buying me, I turned back to Chirika.

“You don’t want to kill the Gold Yaksha, the man who was just trying to save his hometown and family, either, right?!”

“So what?! My feelings shouldn’t matter! As long as I can pay my debt to the princess, staining my hands is no—”

I pulled her back by the shoulder as she tried to stand up and bashed my forehead up against hers. Then, at point-blank range, I looked her dead in the eye and yelled.

“Don’t be ridiculous! Would the princess who saved you want you to do that?!”

“Then... what are you saying I should do?”

“Whatever it takes so that you’re not left miserable! The reason why I do what I do is because I want your story to have a happy ending!”

“...!”

I left Chirika speechless, and quickly turned to Sherlyn.

“Sherlyn! Can you take the Mask of Greed with your magic?”

No matter how cursed it was, a mask was a mask. If we got it off of him, he should come to his senses. We at least had to try it.

“As long as you can hold him still for a moment.”

“Got it!”

From my pocket, I pulled out one of the devices Shirley had given me. It was the electromagnetic binding trap she had once used before. By throwing the table-tennis-sized ball onto the ground, it could paralyze the opponent with electric shocks and stop their movement.

“Iris! Corona! Fall back!”

“Okay!”

“Right!”

I waited for the moment the two of them had backed away before throwing the electromagnetic binding trap at the Gold Yaksha’s feet.

Bzz, bzz, bzzt!

The ball burst open, flooding the ground with sparks and lightning.

“Graaah!”

The powerful current ran through the Gold Yaksha’s entire body, paralyzing him.

“Mark!”

That was when Sherlyn used her magic to mark her target, the Mask of Greed

right on the Gold Yaksha's face.

"All right!" With everything going exactly as planned, I shouted out without thinking.

"Steal!"

Next, Sherlyn used her magic to pull the Mask of Greed towards her. With that, it should pop right off, but...

"Wait, wh-wh-what?!" Sherlyn stammered.

The reason was immediately apparent.

"Why is he getting pulled along with it?"

While the Mark spell had definitely targeted the Mask of Greed, for some reason, the Steal spell didn't pull it off of him. Instead, it was pulling them both together. Naturally, seeing the hatchet-wielding Gold Yaksha come at her made her panic.

"Urgh!"

There was no time to think. At this rate, Sherlyn was in danger.

"Damn it!"

I threw myself at the Gold Yaksha, stopping him from getting any closer to Sherlyn.

"Urrrrrgh!"

But he was still easily bigger than me and several times my weight. With my strength typical of an average high school boy, there was no way I could support myself. I was slowly being pushed backwards, leaving a trail on the ground. Even though he was still paralyzed for now, he could easily snap my neck the moment he came around. At this close range, there was no telling when that would be.

"...!"

But being so close had an unexpected benefit. I looked up and suddenly realized why the mask wasn't coming off his face.

"Sherlyn! The mask is attached to his skin!"

“Whaaat?! If it’s part of his face, I can’t steal that!”

“Just think of it like ripping off a bandaid! Pull with all your might in one fell swoop!”

I was holding him in place right now, after all. And as long as I was pushing him one way and Sherlyn was pulling the mask the other, that sucker should come right off... I hope!

“Graaargh!”

“Uh-oh!”

The paralysis must have finally worn off, as the Gold Yaksha shrugged off my grip and swung his hatchet upward. I nearly closed my eyes reflexively, but Corona jumped in and kicked his arm, sending the hatchet flying far away.

“Reckless as always, aren’t you?!”

“So we just have to hold him back, right?!”

Iris joined the two of us in holding on to him.

The mask seemed to be pulled stronger than before, showing the seam between face and mask clearly. But it still wouldn’t come off completely.

“You lot...”

“Chirika!”

At some point, Chirika had stood up in a daze to watch our attempts at tearing the mask off the man’s face.

“Chirika! Use your Silkworm Slash to separate the mask from his face! The seam is easily visible right now because Steal is pulling on it!”

When I saw that she was still holding on to her katana, I yelled on the spur of the moment.

“What?! If I mess up, he’ll...!”

The borderline between skin and mask... Thickness-wise, I was asking her to cut something with surgical precision. I knew it was a lot, but...

“You can do it, Chirika!”

She was a master at her craft, able to achieve god-like feats without breaking a sweat, overcoming layers of obstacles like the iron box and bottle to slash only the flag at the mast of the intricate model ship. If she could resolve herself, I was certain she had this in the bag.

“Stop... it! Without... this, I...!”

“Wha?! He suddenly got stronger!”

The Gold Yaksha grew stronger the harder we pulled. Despite there being three people on our side, we were overwhelmed by his swelling muscles that threatened to shake us off at any moment. We couldn't hold on for much longer.

“Chirika! Which would you prefer?! Having to end up killing this man because of your fear of failure, or believing in the skill that you refined and using it to save a life... What would a samurai do?!”

“...!”

The hesitation in Chirika's eyes transmogrified into anger. It looked like using her frankness and pride as a point of provocation was the correct choice... I'd have to apologize later.

“Fine...! I'll do it! Make sure you hold him in place properly!”

Chirika braced her katana with a unique stance, breathing in once as she locked on to her target. Then...

“Silkworm Cut!”

An invisible blade was launched from her katana. The next moment, the Gold Yaksha we were so desperately trying to hold back froze on the spot... and all the energy drained from his body.

Thunk!

“Ow!”

Something hard bounced off my head and tumbled to the ground. I looked down as I supported the slumped-over man... to see the face of the Gold Yaksha fallen on the ground with holes where the eyes should be. It was the Mask of Greed. We'd managed to get it off.

“Phew...”

All the strength drained from my body too, and I gently let the man down on the ground before sinking down myself next to Iris and Corona.

“I-I’m so tired.”

“Me too... He sure got strong there.”

At Iris’s words, I turned to look at the man who had been possessed by the Mask of Greed just moments ago. He was lying on the ground, breathing steadily. After the mask was removed, his body had shrunk until he wasn’t much taller than me. His wife was right, apparently. He did look kinda timid—certainly nothing like a demon. But I reckoned this face was more fitting for a person who could set out alone for a world he knew nothing about in order to save everyone.

“You really did manage to make it work somehow...” Chirika muttered as she approached my sitting form while sheathing her katana.

“It wasn’t me. Iris and Corona were the ones who held him back, and you and Sherlyn were the ones that really got the mask off.”

Hearing my answer, Chirika gave a quiet huff.



“Assuming your point was correct, then that’d mean the lords and princesses who give their subordinates orders are doing nothing too.” She huffed again before bowing her head. “If I were alone, even if I knew of this man’s circumstances, I wouldn’t have been able to take any action other than ending his life for the sake of the princess. I may have had to bear that scar for the rest of my life. Without your determination, this man wouldn’t have been saved... And so, thank you, Rekka.”

“...No problem. Let’s take him back to Laputa with us. Hibiki and the others are waiting.”

The people of Shangri-La should all be in Laputa by now, his wife included. It would be good to get them together again. And with that in mind, I picked up the Mask of Greed lest it fall into the wrong hands. We then headed back to the airship and set off once more for the flying island.

Chapter 4: The Greedy King

After we returned to Laputa and delivered the unconscious man to his wife, we met up with everyone else in the Laputian king's private quarters.

"Good to see you back safe, Rekka," said Hibiki.

"You can say that again..." I sighed.

I *had* almost been decapitated, after all. At any rate, I explained to Hibiki and the gang how we'd come to resolve Chirika's story. Then it was Hibiki's turn to tell us how things had gone for them.

"To get straight to the point, we agreed to settle things with Boboza via contest."

"Via contest?"

"A contest for the throne. If we lose, we have to teach Boboza the time-stitching technology. But if we win, he'll allow Nyanyan to take the throne and will support her politically so long as we overlook the little coup incident."

"Wait, so... he gets something either way?"

In other words, even if he lost, he'd get off scot-free for trying to take over the kingdom. He'd just go back to being the next in line for the throne. And if he won, he'd have everything he needed to officially begin his reign as king. It was win-win for him.

"And Nyanyan's okay with all this?" I asked skeptically.

"I only told her she'd have to compete for the throne."

"Uh, don't you think she's gonna be a little upset when she finds out the rest?"

"Probably."

"Come on..."

My shoulders slumped dejectedly at Hibiki's all-too-flat reply. But even so, she was as calm as ever.

“Have you forgotten what’s at stake here, Rekka? In three days’ time... No, it’s already been over a day now. In just two days, Atlantis is going to sink. We need to get Nyanyan on the throne before then.”

“I know, but...”

“In the event that Nyanyan actually manages to earn the right to the throne, the king of Laputa has agreed to arrange the coronation ceremony here on Laputa.”

“The coronation ceremony? Here?”

“Fortunately, Laputa and Atlantis have a close-knit alliance. They’re practically the same kingdom. We’ll have every citizen of Atlantis attend the ceremony, then we’ll extend the ceremony to include all kinds of other events and make it last the whole day.”

If all went according to plan, that would mean the people would be moved—no, evacuated—before Atlantis sank.

“The Nyanyan we met at the bottom of the ocean... Her wish was to save the Atlantians, not Atlantis. Right, Rekka?”

“Yeah... You’re right.” I couldn’t argue there. “If we can win this contest or whatever, it’ll solve both Nyanyan and Sherlyn’s stories at the same time. You’re amazing, Hibiki. You came up with a plan to kill two birds with one stone.”

At the honest praise, Hibiki started blushing and looked away.

“I-It was simply what the situation called for. Really, it’s only possible thanks to the cooperation of the Laputian king.”

The rulers of Laputa and Atlantis had a long history and a common bloodline. Apparently, an offshoot of the Laputian royal family had descended to Atlantis to establish their own dominion. That relationship, combined with the fact that she’d been the one to give the Atlantians the time-stitching technology, gave the Laputian king a great deal of influence over Atlantis’s affairs.

“Also, do you remember how Nyanyan mentioned that Laputa and Atlantis were twin islands?”

“Yeah, she said something about them moving together.”

“That’s right. Specifically, Laputa is pulling the island of Atlantis along. Do you know what that means?”

“Uh, well... It means that Laputa determines the course of Atlantis, right?”

“Yes. It’s the same as a car being pulled by a tow truck. Atlantis is a moving island, but it doesn’t move on its own. Now, just imagine for a moment if you will... What would happen if Laputa flew over a continent?”

“Atlantis would crash right into it!”

“Bingo. It would be a total disaster. So no matter how else you look at it, the fate of Atlantis is in Laputa’s hands... Though I doubt the current king would do anything like that.”

True, she didn’t seem like the evil type. Or rather, that didn’t seem like the kind of thing that would interest her. Which, of course, was great news for all of Atlantis.

“Well, I understand now why you wanted to bring the Atlantians here, but what about this competition? Please don’t tell me Nyanyan and Boboza have to fight each other.”

“As if I’d sign a child up for a fistfight. The competition is going to take place in the form of Atlantis’s most traditional sport...”



“A boat race, huh?” I muttered as I looked over the crowd of spectators gathered along the coastline to witness the race for the throne.

Boat racing had a storied history in Atlantis. It had been popular for over a century, and was normally celebrated in a grand, annual competition. The course was set as a single lap around Atlantis itself. While the island was relatively small, paddling by hand would make the race a grueling contest of endurance rather than speed, but...

“I guess with all the other technology Laputa has, I shouldn’t be surprised there are motorboats...”

They were the kind steered by a tiller rather than a wheel, and while their

appearance was rather retro, their functionality was on par with any modern motorboat I'd ever seen. Actually, their top speed clocked in at a hundred kilometers per hour, which for all I knew well surpassed modern technology.

As for the race itself, the winner would be the first team to complete a lap around the island. The "teams" were really the boat crews, which consisted of four people including the helmsman. Circumnavigating the island would take roughly ten to fifteen minutes, and the whole thing could be watched via long-distance projection machines—basically cameras—mounted on the boats and various checkpoints around the course.

"Bohahaha!"

Suddenly, my eardrums were assaulted with the sound of a grating, obnoxious laugh. When I looked to see who the culprit was, I spotted a stout man with a strange hairdo that resembled a seahorse sitting on top of his head. I recognized him from the projection future Nyanyan had once shown us. But this was my first time seeing him in the flesh.

"So that's Boboza..."

This was Nyanyan's uncle, the mastermind behind the coup.

"Wh-What do you want, Uncle? Did you come here to laugh at us because you think you've already won?"

Despite Nyanyan's surprise at her uncle showing up out of nowhere, she didn't lose her cool.

"Don't get the wrong idea. I mean, I was shocked when you suggested a race in the first place... But I wasn't expecting all of your little friends to be children! Oops, pardon me. I forget that you're still just a child yourself, Princess Nyanyan," he replied, chuckling to himself.

I guess from his perspective, we did just look like a bunch of kids.

"Urgh! I won't lose to you, Uncle! I'm going to win and inherit my father's title!"

"Bohahaha! I'd like to see you try!"

After getting in another good, obnoxious laugh, Boboza wandered off... Er, I

guess he was probably going back to his boat.

“Grr! I’ll show him!”

Nyanyan was raging so hard I could practically see the steam coming out of her ears as she continued to inspect our boat. While she had never entered a race before, she’d apparently been fond of boats since she was young and knew a good deal about them.

“So, Nyanyan,” I asked. “How come a crew is four people? Wouldn’t the boat go faster with fewer people on board?”

“What? Weren’t you listening to the rules? The race allows for interference.”

“Huwah?!”

“Well, directly destroying a boat or intentionally harming the other participants are still considered violations of good conduct.”

“I... I just thought this was a more wholesome sport.”

“It’s typically held as part of a grand event much like a festival. The rules were designed to encourage that flair of excitement. It would be a lot less interesting to watch otherwise.”

So rather than a sport, this was pure entertainment... If she were here, Zeta probably would have scolded me for not getting that sooner.

But interference was considered fair game, huh? That meant the race wouldn’t be decided by speed and skill alone. We’d have to pick our team carefully. If directly harming rival boats or opponents was out of the question, I figured it’d probably be smarter to choose more technically skilled crew members like Satsuki or Shirley.

“Sorry, but I’ll pass,” Shirley said as soon as I brought up who would be participating.

“How come? I bet you’d be good at coming up with ways to hinder our opponent, Shirley.”

“Certainly. But the boat reaches speeds of a hundred kilometers per hour, right? Not to mention how high the waves are today... It’ll be a pretty rough ride. Honestly, I don’t think I’d be able to do much more than cling on to

something.”

“Now that you mention it, the same goes for me...” added Satsuki, her eyebrows dejectedly furrowed.

Not that I blamed them. I hadn’t really processed myself what going at a hundred kilometers an hour would be like. Adding the waves on top of that would make it even more taxing, and anyone thrown off the boat could potentially be seriously injured.

Since this was specifically a contest between Nyanyan and Boboza, it was a given that she had to enter. But since she was the most familiar out of all of us with boats, it was just as well. So if I went along too, that would leave two more spots open. It would probably be too much for Harissa or Tsumiki to handle. Iris and Corona had the stamina for it, but straight-up brawn was really their strong suit. Even though interference was allowed, it wasn’t like I could send them to attack Boboza.

“Um, Rekka...” said Rain, hesitantly raising her hand.

“What’s up, Rain?” I asked.

“I don’t know about interference, but I think I’d be useful on a boat. I’ve definitely got sea legs, you could say, and I’d even be all right if I happened to get thrown overboard.”

“Hmm...”

It was true there probably wasn’t any better ally to have on the high seas than a mermaid. In the event of an emergency, we’d all be glad to have her aboard.

“All right. So the crew will be Nyanyan, me, Rain, and...”

“Why not take me as your number four?”

“Sherlyn?”

Indeed, it was the ever-smiling, mature, laid-back Sherlyn who raised her hand and volunteered to fill the fourth slot. For the record, knowing that there would be trouble if the Atlantians saw it, we’d asked Harissa to hide Sherlyn’s crown with her invisibility magic.

“I’ve fled the police on boats before, so I at least won’t be a hindrance. And I

have to say I'm pretty good at outsmarting people. Besides..."

"Besides?"

"My life is on the line here too. I'd like to participate if possible."

"That's fair."

It was easy enough to understand how she felt. Her magic was pretty versatile too, and wouldn't be against the rules since it wasn't explicitly offensive. So, with the team finally decided, I went to inform Nyanyan, who was still inspecting the boat.

"...And that's our roster. Is that okay with you, Nyanyan?"

"It's fine by me. I'm not old enough to participate in the races normally, so it's not like I have any familiar teammates to bring along," Nyanyan said as she wiped the sweat from her brow.

It seemed she'd been pretty rigorous in inspecting the boat. Her clothes were all wrinkled and dirty now.

"Ah, hold still a sec," I said, reaching out to wipe an oil smear off her forehead.

"Mm..." Nyanyan closed her eyes and held still.

"There. All better."

"Thanks."

"Hang on, there's also... Wait, those are bags under your eyes. Did you not sleep last night?"

"Well, I was up quite late looking after the patients. I might be a little low on sleep right now."

"Hey... Well, it's not like I helped or anything, but today's a big day, you know? Sleep is important."

"Yeah, you're right..." Nyanyan smiled with a troubled expression before tightly clenching her fists in determination. "But I'll definitely win against my uncle! I'll be the one to succeed my father!"

Even sleep-deprived, she seemed to be overflowing with energy. At the very

least, I didn't have to worry about her motivation levels.

"All right, then let's board the boat and get ready. It's almost time for the race."

"Right!"



"The race for the throne of Atlantis... will now commence. I, the king of Laputa... will be presiding over this contest."

Just before the race, the king of Laputa announced to the crowd that she would personally oversee the handling of the prize. The people intently listened in silence to the young yet dignified king, but...

"We shall leave the commentary... to you."

"All riiight! Just leave it to me, Your Majesty!"

"H-Huh?!"

I was taken aback by the energetic young girl who stepped out from behind the Laputian king.

"YEEEEAAAAAH!"

But upon her appearance, the crowd burst into a ruckus of cheering and fist pumping. Looking around, I could see vendors selling drinks and food, as well as spectators amusing themselves by placing bets on who would win.

"Wh-What is going on?" I asked.

"I told you this was a grand event," said Nyanyan.

"Yeah, but still... The throne's on the line here."

It wasn't my place to tell them to be respectful, but good grief.

"And now, without further ado, it's time for our teams to board their boats!"

The worst offender of all was probably the overexcited commentator herself, who was riding a miniature airship hovering over the starting line. She was probably going to report on the race from the air. Whatever, I guess. It was probably a good thing to have a third party watching the race closely.

Anyway, the four of us boarded our boat on cue. Nyanyan, of course, took the helm. I didn't recognize the guy who appeared to be the helmsman for the other team, but Nyanyan froze when she saw him.

"What's wrong?"

"That man is last year's champion."

"Seriously?"

"That lowlife uncle of mine...! I guess he's willing to do whatever it takes to win."

There, Boboza seemed to notice us and smiled like he was ready to break out into guffawing at any second. Nyanyan gritted her teeth and furrowed her brow in a mix of displeasure and frustration.

"It'll be fine. I'm not above using whatever means necessary in order to win, either. We won't lose," I said, patting her on the shoulder and trying to encourage her.

"R-Really? You seem an awful lot like the fair and square, by-the-book type."

"Me? Nah. Kind of the opposite, honestly. I'm a weak nobody, so I have to play whatever cards I can to win. Scheming and loopholes are right in my wheelhouse."

Like zapping a Demon Overlord with a laser or cheating my way out of an underground labyrinth by busting through the ceiling. That kinda stuff.

"At any rate, just leave it to me. All you have to do is concentrate on driving."

"All right."

Nyanyan took her seat by the till and looked ahead with a slightly less tense expression. Once both teams had settled in, we sat in position waiting for the signal.

"Oookay, folks! It's almost time to start!"

The crowd seemed to reach peak size now that the main event was fast approaching, and the commentator took that as a sign it was time to kick things off. She pulled out a red flag and held it high overhead. Both Nyanyan and the

other helmsman had their eyes locked on it, and the moment it dropped...

“Raaaargh!”

Boboza’s team suddenly threw something our way, but Sherlyn and I knocked it into the water before it could do anything. Because of that, I couldn’t tell for sure, but I would have bet money it was a smokescreen or something else meant to blind us.

“Tch!” Boboza clicked his tongue.

“I saw that one coming a mile away!” I yelled mockingly back at him.

“What a start! Team Boboza launched an attack right out of the gate, but Team Nyanyan was ready and waiting for it! Both teams start off neck and neck!”

Just as the commentator in the tiny airship described, our boats were practically sailing along next to each other.

“Oof, wow! This really is a rough ride!”

If Shirley hadn’t warned us earlier, I probably would’ve been thrown overboard immediately. But I was prepared and held fast to the side of the boat as I kept a watchful eye on Boboza and his team.

“There’s no way they’d try the same thing twice, right?”

Maybe it was because their initial surprise attack had failed so spectacularly, but they didn’t seem to be up to anything more. We continued to sail speedily along as we circled the island, eventually coming to a sharp curve.

“Crap!”

Boboza’s team got to it before us and took the inside lane, pulling ahead. By the time we came out on the other side, they were about half a minute ahead of us. It was starting to show that they had a former champion driving their boat. The difference in skill was too great for even a talented amateur like Nyanyan to overcome.

“Ugh!”

She clenched her jaw, desperately trying to control the boat as it rocked

violently up and down. With her emotionally charged handling, we were hot on the trail of Boboza's team. But then, a strange shadow appeared on the horizon...

"Uh, what's that?"

"Ladies and gentlemen, we're now approaching the first obstacle!" said the commentator, inadvertently answering my question. "The crowd favorite, the rocky zone, has made another return this year! One wrong move here will spell ruin for either team's boat, but going around will cost them on the clock! What's it going to be?! It's time for our competitors to show us what they're made of!"

"What are we going to do, Nyanyan?" I asked.

"Shut up! I'm concentrating right now!" she yelled as we charged right into the rocky zone.

As its name implied, the rocky zone was indeed quite rocky. Boulders had been scattered with just enough space between them to allow a single boat to pass through. Visibility was terrible, and at the speed we were going, the commentator was right. One misstep, and we'd be out of the running immediately here.

Thunk!

"Uwah!"

It didn't take long before we clipped one of the large rocks. Really, all we did was bump into it a little, but it felt like a full-on collision with how fast we were going. I looked around in a panic, but thankfully no one had fallen overboard. Nevertheless, the mistake had cost us a precious few seconds that allowed Boboza's team to pull even further ahead.

"Just you wait, Uncle!"

"Calm down, Nyanyan! It's too dangerous to be reckless here. Let's just get through the rocky zone safely for now."

"Tch!"

"I understand how you feel, but you have to be patient. The race only just

started. We still have plenty of time to catch up.”

The worst-case scenario was crashing the boat. If we had to retire, it would be an instant win for Boboza. As such, I tried to calm Nyanyan down as much as possible to increase our chances of getting out of this obstacle safely.

“Both teams are moments away from making it through... Oh, what’s this?!”

I was terrified to think what would make the commentator gasp like that, but I would soon find out the cause.

“A-A net?!”

There was a net stretched between two boulders almost dead in front of us, forcing us to bring the boat to an emergency halt.

“Curse you, Uncle!”

Nyanyan clicked her tongue as she turned us around to take another route. At least we were safe, but this little stunt of Boboza’s really did cost us. By the time we got out of the rocky zone, his team was a good twenty meters or so ahead of us.

“Oh, no! After getting caught in Team Boboza’s net, Team Nyanyan has fallen behind! Will they ever recover?!”

As the high-spirited commentator rehashed the situation for the crowd, we did our best to close the gap.

“Rekka. What should we do...?” Rain asked as she clung to the boat.

“Based on the inclusion of interference and obstacles, the main point of this race is its entertainment value. I’d bet there’s somewhere ahead that’ll give us a chance to turn the tables.”

The real thrill of a competition was the moment of reversal. The great upset. The comeback. Especially in a race. If there were obstacles, surely there would be *something* along the way that would give us a fighting chance. Of course, I wasn’t expecting it to come for free.

“Keep your eyes peeled, ladies and gentlemen! Now that we’ve reached the middle stretch of the course, it’s time for... the dark cave!”

Hearing that, I turned to see what we were getting into. Up ahead past Boboza's boat was a large cape jutting out from the island. There appeared to be a cave entrance right at the base of it along the water.

"You guessed it, folks! The dark cave is pitch black inside! Our teams will have to navigate through it with only the light they have on board... if they dare! The waters are shallow, and the rocks are sharp! One wrong move will put a hole right through the hull of their boats, but they say fortune favors the brave! If they successfully manage to make it through, the dark cave is actually an incredible shortcut!" the commentator explained. "But buyer beware! Looking at the race data from the past ten years, the crash rate is an astounding 98 percent! There have been a few lucky teams who made it through, but their boats were too badly damaged to even finish the race!"

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I guess. And it looked like Boboza's team was playing it safe. They veered away from the entrance on a course to go around the cape instead. But what about us? This shortcut might be our chance, but the commentator made it sound way too dangerous. Should we hold out for another opportunity? The race was already halfway over now, so if we waited too long...

"Rekka, do you have anything small that can give off light?" Rain suddenly asked.

"Um... If you only need a small light, what about my cellphone?" I asked in return.

"That'll do. Let me borrow it," she replied in a tone that didn't allow any room for argument.

That was rare coming from her, but she didn't hesitate to take my phone. She then turned and told Nyanyan to head for the dark cave.

"A-Are you sure?" Nyanyan asked, looking at Rain with uncertainty.

In response, Rain simply smiled and said, "Yes, I will lead the boat with this light. Make sure you follow me carefully."

"But Rain, this boat goes a hundred kilometers an hour. Even if we decelerate in the cave, do you think you'll be able to keep ahead of us?" I asked, worried.

Rain then turned her calm and composed smile on me.

“My, Rekka. Have you forgotten? I am a mermaid. I won’t lose to anyone in the water. Even in total darkness, I can clearly make out the tidal currents. Avoiding obstructions will be simple,” she reassured me with a confident nod.

“All right, Nyanyan! You heard her—to the cave!”

“Oh fine, whatever!” Nyanyan shouted, tossing her worries to the wind as she made a beeline for the cave entrance.

“Oho! Team Nyanyan has gotten ambitious! They’re headed for the shortcut in the dark cave... But will they make it out safely?!”

Our unexpected course had certainly gotten the commentator’s attention.

“Well, then, I’ll be off.”

After giving us a polite bow, Rain hopped off the boat. Jumping into the roaring, open ocean at speeds like this would ordinarily be tantamount to suicide, but Rain was no ordinary girl. Several seconds after her long, pink hair disappeared under the waves, she resurfaced alongside the boat. She then accelerated and overtook us with ease, slipping into the dark cave. We followed her in.

“Wow...”

True to name, it really was dark in here. Without a light, you couldn’t see anything at all. That 98-percent crash rate was perfectly understandable. In order to navigate safely through this place, you’d have to go at a dead crawl. That is, if you didn’t have a mermaid leading the way for you.

In order to keep track of the light from the phone she was holding, we turned down the light on the ship as low as we could and proceeded through the cave doing our best to suppress the fear of screwing this whole operation up. Eventually, another light came into view.

“Is that...?”

Yes, we’d made it to the end of the cave! Coming out into bright daylight again, however, we were all temporarily blinded by the sun. I clung to the side of the boat as best I could so I wouldn’t immediately be thrown overboard once

we hit rough water again, but Nyanyan's vision was compromised too. We were forced to slow down for a few seconds, but once I could see again...

"Would you looky there! It's Team Nyanyan, alive and well! Defying all odds and expectations, they've somehow made it out of the dark cave and are now well in the lead ahead of Team Boboza, who took the long way around the cape!"

Hearing that, my heart leaped.

"Nyanyan, can you see yet?! Can you still drive?!"

"Even if I can't, I will!" Nyanyan yelled, accelerating the boat once more.

This was it, the grand reversal. It had been dangerous, but we'd come out on top. And we had to seize it—which, unfortunately, meant there wasn't time to stop completely and get Rain back on the boat, so she had to follow us in the water for now. The slowdown after exiting the cave had already cost us precious time, and Boboza's team was already coming around the cape by the time we got back up to speed. In short, we were ahead as we entered the last leg of the race, but not by as much as I would have liked.

"Both teams are in the home stretch now, folks! Team Nyanyan is in the lead, but can they keep it up?!" the commentator announced as we hit the final turn.

"Bohahahahaha! You did better than I expected, Princess Nyanyan!"

"Ugh!"

We could hear Boboza shouting from his boat, which was dangerously close behind us now. He was apparently leaving all the hard work on their side to his subordinates, so he was free to taunt us all he liked. Of course, Nyanyan was concentrating and didn't have the leisure to respond in kind. She was desperate to keep her lead over last year's champion.

"But it's such a shame..." Boboza continued. "You didn't stand a chance from the beginning!"

"Wh-What—?!"

I wanted to ask what he meant, but before I could, our boat quickly began decelerating.

“Huh?!”

We managed to finish rounding the corner while coasting, but Boboza’s team overtook us almost instantly.

“What?! What’s this?! Team Nyanyan has suddenly come to a stop! Is it bad luck, or was it some plot?! Either way, Team Boboza has pulled ahead to take the lead!”

“What’s wrong, Nyanyan?!”

“I don’t know! It just stopped working!”

“Wait a minute...”

What Boboza just said... Don’t tell me he did something to our boat! It was against the rules to outright damage your opponent’s boat though, which would mean Boboza was cheating. And if that were the case, he’d be automatically disqualified... But Boboza knew that. He might have done something incredibly sneaky that wouldn’t implicate him. Something that would look like an accident.

“N-No...!”

Nyanyan let out a pained groan as she watched her uncle pull away from us. Despair filled her eyes.

“Rekka! If it’s come to this, I’ll pull the boat myself!” Rain declared in the heat of the moment.

She valiantly tried to grab hold of the boat, but there was no way her thin arms would be able to handle a boat this size. No, maybe she couldn’t, but...

“Sherlyn!”

“Mmhmm?”

“I need to ask a ridiculous favor!”

“You got it.”

That was way too easy, but Sherlyn gave me a firm nod and asked what she needed to do.

“Well, first...”

I explained the details of my absurd request.

“That sounds like a recipe for a sore back later, but I guess we don’t have any choice!”

Sherlyn laughed, then...

“Mark!”

She cast her Mark spell on our boat and hopped off.

“Here we go, Sherlyn!”

“Thanks!”

Once she was in the water, Sherlyn swam over to Rain and wrapped her arms around her neck. Rain then took off, zipping ahead of us like she had earlier in a rare, serious display for the mermaid princess.

“Steal!”

Next, we could hear Sherlyn casting her other spell over the crashing waves. The boat Nyanyan and I were on then instantly accelerated, pulled along by Sherlyn’s magic.

“Wh-Wh-Wha?!”

“Hold on to me, Nyanyan!”

She was about to fall right off the boat, so I grabbed on to her and then held on for dear life myself. A mermaid’s top swimming speed easily surpassed that of the boat, as Rain had demonstrated for us earlier in the cave. So with Rain dragging Sherlyn and Sherlyn dragging the boat, we were all moving along at Rain’s breakneck pace. The real question mark in the equation was whether or not Sherlyn would be able to hold on like this. She’d confidently accepted the task, but it still wasn’t guaranteed to work. I was worried, but my worries were blown out of the water as the boat zipped along at an incredible speed. We easily overtook Boboza in the blink of an eye, and...

“Whaaat?!”

We left him and his dumb, shocked face in the dust as we crossed the finish line.





Not two days later, it was time for Nyanyan's coronation ceremony on Laputa. After the race, Boboza had tried to discredit our victory by claiming we cheated. The king of Laputa herself reviewed the claim and determined that we hadn't actually broken any rules, so his argument was thrown out. Go figure he was so fixated on coming up with sneaky ways to slow us down that he didn't even realize that us speeding up on our own was perfectly allowable.

"Even though it was announced beforehand, we had to shuttle all the Atlantians to Laputa via airship... Thank goodness Atlantis is only about as big as Vatican City," sighed Hibiki.

"Yeah, too bad we didn't have any time to sleep..." I sighed in return.

We were both nearly slumped over in exhaustion. All the shuttling to Laputa was work enough as it was, but we also had to coordinate with the soldiers and make sure all of the citizens were accounted for at the coronation ceremony. It wasn't until Satsuki checked with her Omniscient Magic to make sure not even a single kitten had been left behind on Atlantis that we were finally able to relax.

"Well, at least this will resolve Nyanyan's story..."

"Yeah..."

Even R seemed to have taken a load off, and the three of us took a moment to chill until Satsuki came to tell us the coronation was at hand.

"Rekka, Hibiki. The ceremony's about to begin."

"All right. We're coming."

Hibiki and I got up and left the king's private quarters, which we had been using as a break room. The Great Library of the Heavens was the only manmade structure on Laputa, and the library was so packed with books there was no space for all the Atlantians. Because of that, the coronation ceremony was being held outside in the courtyard.

Incidentally, the crown being used for the ceremony was the one Nyanyan had removed from Sherlyn. We'd held a simplified but official succession ritual

after winning the race so Nyanyan could become the legitimate ruler and therefore remove the curse. Since Sherlyn had told Nyanyan at the beginning that the crown was something she'd retrieved from Boboza and accidentally put on, she went and actually stole the real crown—the crown from this time period—from Boboza in order to back up her story, then handed it over to the king of Laputa for safekeeping.

“Ah, Rekka!” Rachelle called out, waving and smiling as we exited the library.

“You’re in an awfully good mood today. What’s up?”

I couldn’t help remembering how she’d spent the beginning of this trip complaining about the lack of carnage.

“Heh heh, well, I got my fill of love energy from everyone when you grabbed on to Nyanyan during the race, so I’m totally satisfied for now!”

“You don’t say...”

I had nothing else to say to that. I guess at least there was no ensuing rampage this time, so no harm, no foul...

Anyway, after shaking off the dumb angel that doggedly followed me around, I headed backstage where the ceremony was set to take place. And yes, there was actually a stage. The little robots of Laputa had built it overnight.

“Heya, Rekka,” said Sherlyn with a friendly wave.

“So you’re finally here,” said Chirika with a smirk.

They and the other girls had already gathered backstage, and they welcomed us as we arrived. Technically, we had nothing to do with Atlantis or its people, so we’d decided to watch the ceremony from behind the curtain like this rather than standing out in the courtyard with all the other Atlantians. And the king of Laputa helped make that all possible.

“Nyanyan Atlantia, daughter of the late King Zezenova, we acknowledge you as the legitimate successor of the crown, and present you... with this...”

Actually standing on the ground instead of sitting on her flying sphere, the king of Laputa gently placed the crown on Nyanyan’s head as she knelt down to receive it.

“Zezenova was a good king... who served his people well. Do you swear to carry out his righteous rule... and follow in his footsteps?”

“I swear it.”

Nyanyan readily agreed, and the moment she did, the crowd in the courtyard erupted into cheers.

“Hooray for Her Majesty Nyanyan!”

“Long live the new king!”

They were all celebrating Nyanyan’s ascension. It wasn’t like she’d done anything as king yet, but the people still welcomed her warmly. That was, I’m sure, in no small part thanks to the Laputian king’s praise of her father.

“You all...”

Nyanyan seemed to feel it too. She trembled with emotion as she looked upon her adoring people. The king of Laputa observed this all for a while herself before tapping her staff against the ground to get everyone’s attention.

“Let us now commence the festivities to celebrate... the new king. Eat, drink, and dance... to your heart’s content.”

“YEEEEAAAAAH!”

Cheers—or rather, one unified roar—several times louder than before echoed through the courtyard as the people began chanting the king of Laputa’s name.

“How self-interested...” I sighed.

“That’s how the citizens usually are. They vastly prefer celebration to ceremony,” Rain replied with a smile. “But the number of people looking up at the king with pride rather than looking away with disinterest is a real testament to the goodness of a kingdom.”

Come to think of, Rain was a princess too. Those words had a certain weight coming from her. But just about as we finished talking, an exhausted Nyanyan retreated backstage.

“Phew, I’m beat...”

“Good work.”

“This is more taxing than the race for the throne was. I wanna go home and sleep...” Nyanyan started to slump over immediately, causing the crown to slip precariously on her head.

“Rekka’s right, Nyanyan. You did well.”

“Oh, Rain. Heal me...” Nyanyan staggered into Rain’s embrace and made her pat her head lovingly.

I honestly felt the same sense of relief, like we’d really accomplished something, and let out a small sigh.

“Gratz on saving the story, Rekka...”

“Hm? R?”

Maybe I was just imagining it, but R seemed a little more deadpan than usual. Really, all I’d done was see to it that Nyanyan ascended the throne. The safety of the Atlantians wasn’t fully guaranteed yet... Wait, actually, come to think of it, we’d never even figured out why Atlantis sunk in the first place.

“So how does it feel to take over the throne?” Rain asked as she stroked Nyanyan’s hair.

“Hmm...” Nyanyan mumbled against Rain’s chest before narrowing her eyes. “It still doesn’t feel quite real... but I think I get it now.”

“Get what?”

“Why my father...”

Nyanyan began to answer Rain with a tinge of embarrassment, but then...

“Kyah!”

“Uwah!”

A sudden tremor rocked Laputa, knocking us all down. Those with a better sense of balance were back on their feet quickly and did what they could to help, like cutting down falling objects to shield everyone who was still on the ground. But while we were coping with things backstage, we could hear the clamor and panic of the crowd beyond the curtain.

“What are these tremors?” I asked.

We were on a flying island. There shouldn't be anything to cause tremors. It wasn't like a massive hunk of land could hit turbulence like an airplane would, either.

"Hmm, I see... So that's... what it was."

I looked up towards the source of that strangely calm voice to see the Laputian king sitting on her sphere, watching the shaking trees while nodding.

"What are you talking about?"

"Previously, you said that Atlantis... would sink. And just now... We figured out the reason."

"The reason?"

She'd figured out why Atlantis would sink? But we were on Laputa right now...

"You've heard that Laputa and Atlantis are twin islands, no?"

"Nyanyan mentioned it, yeah." She'd said they maintained a fixed distance between each other and that Atlantis moved whenever Laputa did. "What about it?"

"When Laputa moves, so too does Atlantis... But while Laputa floats in the sky, Atlantis floats on the ocean below."

"Okay..."

I guess that much made sense. If Atlantis was a moving island, it was basically free-floating on the surface of the water.

"You could think of it... as Laputa being connected to Atlantis... by an invisible rope. Simply put, Atlantis hangs below Laputa... by that rope." Perhaps it was because she had the advantage of sitting on a floating sphere, but the Laputian king seemed wholly unconcerned about the worsening tremors. "And it seems that, as it were... Laputa can no longer... stay afloat."

"How come?"

"The island has likely reached... the end of its natural life. And when it falls, so too shall Atlantis. That is what is written... in the ancient scripts."

"What?!"

If Atlantis was essentially dangling from Laputa and Laputa went down, then yeah, Atlantis would go right down with it. And come to think of it, when we'd first told her that Atlantis was in danger of sinking, the king had said something about it involving Laputa... This must have been what she meant.

"How long do we have until Laputa falls?!"

The tremors weren't stopping, but I at least wasn't feeling the sense of weightlessness that came with rapid descent. Maybe, if the island was basically dying of old age like the king had said, it would be a slow fall?

"We cannot tell you precisely, but perhaps... about an hour?"

Just an hour? The Nyanyan we'd met at the bottom of the ocean had said that Atlantis sunk so suddenly that there wasn't even time to prepare the ritual to return to the past... And it seemed like that was happening again.

"Damn it...!"

Moving all the Atlantians to Laputa had completely backfired on us. It had taken us the entirety of two days to move them all up here, so there was no way we could evacuate them all now before it was too late.

"Your Majesty! Is there no way to save Laputa?!"

"Let us think... Japan is not far from here. If we utilize all of the island's propulsion system, we might be able... to make an emergency landing."

"Then—"

"However... there is not enough time. Even if we hurry... land would be just out of reach."

"No..."

The Laputian king informed us of the hopeless situation in a rather plain fashion.

"And we'd finally found... something new to research... in people. Alas, this is fate," she said with a small sigh.

Maybe it was the wisdom and weight of all her years, but she looked so gallant in that moment.

“Hey, don’t chalk things up to fate so readily!”

But unfortunately for her, I wasn’t about to accept the end that easily.

“Your Majesty... You said that Atlantis’s connection to Laputa is like a rope, right?”

“That’s right.”

“And it’s Laputa that’s reached the end of its lifespan, so basically its ability to fly is fading, right?!”

“That’s also right...”

“Then...” I looked Nyanyan’s way and hesitated to say the rest out loud, but resolved myself and did it anyway. “If we cut the rope and drop the dead weight of Atlantis, will it make enough of a difference that Laputa might actually stay afloat until we reach Japan?”

“Rekka...?”

Nyanyan’s eyes went wide upon hearing my preposterous suggestion. Meanwhile, the Laputian king barely batted an eye.

“If we cut the rope, so to speak, it wouldn’t be impossible. We would simply have to destroy the island of Atlantis. However... we would have to do so within the next... fifteen minutes. Otherwise... our altitude will already be too compromised.”

“Roger that.” With a nod, I turned to Corona. “Corona, do you think you can do it?”

“I can try.”

“There’s no time. Please.”

Corona nodded and transformed into full Demon King mode before taking off and heading down towards Atlantis. Would she be able to destroy a whole island on her own? I had to start thinking of backup plans ASAP.

“Rekka...”

But in the midst of that, Nyanyan’s worried voice reached my ears. Silently, I turned to face her. She was looking up at me, her face pale and her eyes

wavering.

“Is what you were saying true...? Are you really going to destroy Atlantis? Our homeland?”

“I’m sorry, Nyanyan...”

I couldn’t think of any way to save everyone here other than cutting Atlantis loose in order for Laputa to make it to land.

“...”

Yet even if that saved everyone, Atlantis was still Nyanyan’s home. Of course she’d be devastated over losing it. She might even argue against it or come to hate me over it. But even so, in order to save her story...

“Rekka,” R suddenly called out to me.

She had her hat pulled down over her eyes so her mouth was the only visible feature on her face. She’d been doing that and acting a little strange for a while now... I had a bad feeling about this.

“Please leave Laputa with all the heroines immediately. If you use all the airships on this island, most of the people of Atlantis can still be saved.”

“Wh-What...?”

R would make nasty comments about my progress on a story from time to time, but she’d never told me to straight-up abandon one before. I was kind of shaken to hear it, but she explained while continuing to keep her eyes hidden from me.

“Corona’s dark magic isn’t enough to destroy Atlantis. It might have been a different story if you had a large quantity of Tsumiki’s dark matter on hand... But fifteen minutes isn’t enough to prepare that.”

“What? But then...”

“Is your plan to make Satsuki use her Omniscient Magic to look up a strong spell like Divine Judgment and cast it to help out? She doesn’t have nearly as much mana as Messiah Kyandistrapps, you know. At most, she could use it once or twice. Do you remember how many times he had to use it to destroy that meteor? Or is your plan to ask Rachelle? Do you really think everyone can

produce enough love energy for her in this dire a situation?”

R called me out on everything that had crossed my mind, leaving me at a complete loss for words. Wait, more importantly...

“Why are you telling me all this? Aren’t you forbidden from helping me with any stories?”

That’s what she’d told me in the past when I asked her for advice, but if that was really the case, it was breaking the rules for her to be telling me so plainly which plans would fail.

“The answer is simple: Nyanyan’s story is already over, so I’m free to give you all the advice I want,” she said in her usual matter-of-fact way.

But how could that be? There was no way Nyanyan’s story was over right now with Atlantis on the verge of destruction...

“What are you talking about, R?”

“I already congratulated you on completing it, didn’t I? Just think about it. What did I tell you when we first came to the past and met this Nyanyan?”

When we first got here? If I recalled correctly, she’d said that Nyanyan’s wish wasn’t to save Atlantis per se, but to do something about the coup... It was different than what the Nyanyan we’d met at the bottom of the ocean had wanted, so it changed our angle in pursuing her story here. But either way, I’d known Atlantis was going to sink and done what I could to try and save the people. I’d assumed it would all work out, but... No, it couldn’t be!

“The Namidare bloodline makes you the last hope of heroines who are stuck in desperate stories. Desperate, but not completely doomed. If you get caught up in a story, that means there’s still a chance of it being saved. And you did that here. You helped Nyanyan win the race and ascend the throne.” R paused for a moment before continuing. “And at that point, Nyanyan’s story was resolved. All the Nyanyan here in the past wanted you to do was help her take the crown. It didn’t involve the fate of Atlantis or Laputa or anything past that. In other words... You aren’t involved in a story right now.”

If I wasn’t involved in the story, that meant my bloodline didn’t apply... That meant that despite all the work I’d done, there wasn’t necessarily a chance it

would make any difference. This part of what I'd *thought* was Nyanyan's story was potentially doomed from the start. It was similar to what had happened with Lyun, but the difference here was that the story I thought I was trying to solve—Nyanyan's wish to save the people of Atlantis—wouldn't come to be for another thousand plus years. In short, I was out of my element. I was in over my head trying to change the past when it had nothing to do with my bloodline, which was why R was telling me to get out of Dodge. However...

"R, even if all that's true, you know I'm not the type to just turn tail and run, right?"

She heard me, but didn't answer.

"Even if I'm not involved in the story right now, I made a promise to save the people of Atlantis. So I'm not giving up until the bitter end!"

I declared my intentions clearly, but R just sighed.

"Well, I figured as much..." R raised her head and flashed a slightly more exasperated expression than usual before sighing again. "So, what are you going to do then? Even if you're not going to give up, I can't allow you to willingly walk into a romantic suicide pact, you know?"

Corona didn't have enough firepower to destroy the island by herself... If R, with all of her abilities and insight from the future, said so, then I had no reason not to believe it. We had ten minutes left, tops. I began racking my brain for a quick way to come up with the additional firepower we were lacking.

"Ngh... Hngh..."

Before me, Nyanyan was moaning in anguish. There was no way of saving everyone other than destroying Atlantis. However, Atlantis was her homeland. It had been her whole life up until now. It had taken the Nyanyan we'd met at the bottom of the ocean over a thousand years of solitude to realize that she'd rather save her people than her kingdom, but the Nyanyan before us now was only a child. There was no way she'd be able to come to the same conclusion. But just then, Rain placed a hand against the worried girl gently.

"Nyanyan."

"Rain...?"

“As a princess, I know how you must be feeling right now.”

Nyanyan turned to Rain, looking at her intently.

“Our decisions come with great responsibility, and sometimes that’s a frightening thing.”

“That’s right... I’m scared. Atlantis is our home. I know that we have to destroy in order to survive, but I’m still afraid... What if everyone hates me if I don’t stop Rekka? Our home... We’ll have nowhere to go. I’m scared, Rain!”

Nyanyan clung to Rain and spilled her heart to the mermaid princess, who hugged her softly in return.

“I know. I know it’s scary, Nyanyan... But sometimes, as leaders, we have to think ahead. Even if your decision brings sadness right now, as long as there’s a future, you’ll have an opportunity to regain all the happiness lost. I believe in that, Nyanyan. I believe in you,” Rain said, gently letting go of Nyanyan. “So what are you going to do?”

“I... I’m...” After a moment’s hesitation, Nyanyan turned my way. “Rekka... You said it before, right? That you came to save me?”

“Yeah, I did.”

But back then, she only asked me to do something about the coup d’état.

“Then, please.... Forget the kingdom! I beg of you, please save my people!” Nyanyan pleaded, clasping her hands together as if in prayer. “I finally understood earlier... I understood why my father was willing to use his own life to develop medicine for the people.”

If I’m not mistaken, her father, the previous king, had passed away from overusing the time-stitching technology to continuously return to the past in order to make medical advancements.

“He wanted to protect everyone. To a ruler, the people are like family... I was so very sad to be left behind, but...” Sadness filled Nyanyan’s eyes for a brief moment, but she raised her head and continued. “But when I saved those people who thanked me and when everyone welcomed me as the new king with such warm smiles, I finally understood why my father lived and died the

way he did. I finally understand how great of a king he truly was. I want to be just like him. So, please, Rekka... Please save us!"

There, Nyanyan humbly bowed her head low. It seemed saving the people of Shangri-La had affected an incredible change of heart within her. The pampered princess grew into a real ruler. That little bit of life experience had opened up a whole new world for her. It was a shame that revelation was pointless now that everything was on the verge of destruction... is what someone else might have said. But to me, her words just now were all the more reason to try and save this place.

"Well, R?" I asked, turning to the girl from the distant future floating beside me.

She gave a small nod.

"As of this moment, you're now involved in a new story. Feel free to go all out like usual."

"You bet I will!"

Because Nyanyan's feelings had evolved, her story was now being rewritten once more. And the fact that I was officially involved now meant there was a chance we could save it.

At times like these, my best strategy was to go over the current story in my head. What did I have at hand? What had already happened? What had I learned from it? With only five minutes left, I'd have to think fast. Time was running out.

But no matter how fast the clock was ticking, no matter how hopeless the situation seemed... I was going to do it! I was going to save everyone! I just had to come up with an idea!

"Oh...?"

That reminded me of something.

"...Wh-What?" Chirika asked in confusion when my determined gaze fell upon her.



“Can’t you go any faster, Rachelle?!”

“Eep! This is angel abuse!”

“I’ll do whatever you want when we get back, so put up with it for now and try harder!”

“Didn’t you say that last time too?!” Rachelle screamed as she sped up.

It was a good thing she’d replenished her love energy during the race. Anyway, the sinking city and Corona firing off her dark magic at it eventually came into view.

“Corona!” I called.

“Is that you, young man?” she asked through ragged breaths.

Looking down from the air, I could see there were great holes all over Atlantis. She’d done a hell of a job, but it still wasn’t enough to demolish the island completely.

“Take a breather, Corona. Save your energy in case my plan fails and you need to clean up after me.”

“...What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to test my own greed,” I replied lightly as I reached into my shirt... and took out the Mask of Greed.

“That’s...!”

“If I become a demon, you two will have to stop me.”

Without any further ado, I put the mask on my face.

“...Guh?!”

The Mask of Greed was a cursed item that turned humans into demons. Furthermore, the mask absorbed greed in exchange for strength. The greedier the human, the stronger the demon. And the greed that I held was...

“Guh... Rrgh... Ugh!”

I groaned relentlessly. It felt like my head was being torn apart from the inside out. I could tell that the Mask of Greed was absorbing my greed and

reconstructing my body with great power...

“R-Rekka...?” Rachelle called out, uncertain.

Come to think of it, she was still carrying me... I had kinda overlooked that. It was only a matter of time before my mind was taken over by the demon I’d become.

“Rachelle... drop... me...”

Of course, I meant on the island, but would she figure that out? Well, I guess I could trust the dumb angel at least that much.

“A-Are you sure? A fall from this height should kill a human.”

“It’s fine... Right now, I’m...”

I looked into Rachelle’s eyes from behind the mask and bared my fangs.

“...a demon.”

I said it in a voice so low that it surprised even me. Rachelle seemed to sense something and let out a small yelp as she tossed me into the air. I would have appreciated being thrown a little gentler, but whatever.

As I fell, I focused. While it was partly to get the timing of my landing on Atlantis right, there was a more important factor at play.

“Nuh... guh, ah... AAHH!”

I had to be aware. Aware of the true identity of the greed swirling within me, trying to pull me somewhere deep and dark. I concentrated on it with all my might. If it was weaker than I’d expected, I probably wouldn’t be able to break Atlantis apart. I’d probably just be crushed by the impact when I hit the ground.

So I focused. I focused for all I was worth and summoned the very roots of greed from my heart, offering them up in exchange for power.

“...!”

I opened my eyes. The land was closing in at a terrifying speed, but there was apparently already something inhuman about me. I was unnaturally calm. Finally, I recalled one last thing—what Chirika had said to me in Shangri-La.

“I’d call that greed rather than arrogance. You’re attempting to save

everything yourself.”

She was right. I wanted to save everything and everyone. And for that, I felt a burning greed that consumed all else within me.

A magical childhood friend, a space princess, a sorcerer from another world, the poster child of a family restaurant, a guardian of the world below, a mythical beast that was deceived, a girl who shared my fate, a vampire with a hundred-year grudge, a homunculus whose destiny had been predetermined for her, a treasure hunter with a sick little brother she tried her best to take care of, a grieving mermaid, a gremlin space pirate, a lonely scientist, the president of a club that was on the verge of disbandment, an exorcist of a school president, a psychic who loved her friends like family, an idol with amnesia, a sealed-away Demon King, a spirit who had lost her little sister, a nekomata girl who was just looking for a home, a hungry fallen angel, a brilliant director in dire straits, a transforming superhero who needed a helping hand, a wayward nun, a wounded fairy, a samurai from the past, a cursed phantom thief, and a princess who just wanted to save her people... Just how many stories do you think I've desired to save until now?!

On top of that, I still had to prevent the War of All one day. I wanted to do that for the sake of R, L, the heroines, and everyone else who was part of the future. So take all of that, mask! Take my greed and give me strength!

As I clenched my fist, each and every muscle in my arm made a strange sound as it swelled almost explosively. I couldn't see because of the mask, but I still had arms, right? Well, whatever. That didn't even matter.

“RAAAAAAH!”

I slammed my fist into the ground below and felt it give way.

Epilogue

After destroying Atlantis, I lost consciousness... and the next I woke, I was in the Great Library of the Heavens. I was lying in a bed in the Laputian king's private quarters, surrounded by the worried faces of my friends.

"Long time no see, huh?"

Ow, ow, owowow! I'd gone for a lighthearted greeting, but they all just started punching me! They held back a bit, but I guess using the Mask of Greed without letting them know was a bad move after all.

In reality, it took Sherlyn's magic and everyone's power to turn me back into a human afterwards. I'd have to do a special favor for not just Rachelle, but all of them once we returned to the future... which made me kind of want to remain in the past.



And so, I don't know if it was because I had turned into a demon and destroyed an island, but I could barely move for a while. In that time, a lot happened... Well, omitting most of the details, various events transpired with the girls nursing me back to health that greatly pleased Rachelle, and I was finally on my feet two days later.

For the record, the island of Laputa landed safely thanks to all of our efforts. In fact, it fit rather snugly in a valley, I was told.

"We intend on filling in the gaps between the island and valley, and camouflaging it as a mountain... later," the king had said. "Either way, however... Laputa isn't suited for the agriculture needed to sustain the Atlantians. They will need to make their own settlement nearby..."

After that, the entrance to the Great Library of the Heavens was sealed for the Laputian king to manage by herself. The technology that Laputa held was far more advanced than what existed in this era. On the off chance that it was leaked out and used maliciously, it had the potential to cause great tragedy. She said it was a countermeasure to prevent that from happening.

Although she may act mischievously at times and governed a nation of one, the king of Laputa was still a fine, wise ruler.

“Even so, Laputa already looks a lot like a mountain without any camouflage. There aren’t many manmade objects on it to begin with, and the Great Library of the Heavens is worked into the summit,” I muttered to myself as I looked up at the former island from its base.

The Laputian king had told me she needed a sense of the environment and a perspective from the base in order to complete the camouflage, so she’d sent me to take pictures... with a Laputian-made camera, of course. But since she’d asked nicely, here I was snapping one picture after another.

“...”

“Hm? What’s wrong, Chirika?”

Chirika, who had come with me to the base, was looking up at the mountain (the former island of Laputa) with a conflicted expression. When I noticed, I tore my eyes from the viewfinder and tried asking her about it.

“Nothing. I hadn’t noticed when we were in the air, but this island—or rather, this mountain—looks similar to the Disappearing Mountain where I fought the Gold Yaksha.”

“Huh?”

That was where she’d travelled back in time too, right? Was this... the same place?

“I can’t say that it’s identical, but looking at its overall shape and the scenery... There’s a close resemblance,” Chirika said as she tilted her head.

“Maybe the former island of Laputa was just called the Disappearing Mountain in your time?”

“Mm... Perhaps.” Chirika accepted my muttered words and nodded.

Wait a minute... Laputa was only able to make an emergency landing in Japan because I destroyed Atlantis, right? Which means Atlantis sunk into the ocean... Which means before the timeslip, Laputa hadn’t been able to reach Japan since Laputa would have sunk into the ocean along with Atlantis. But in that case,

Chirika couldn't have climbed the Disappearing Mountain and come to my time period, so we wouldn't have been able to impress the king with her Silkworm Slash, which means that we wouldn't have been able to save all these stories...

"Huh?"

"What a time paradox, right?" R commented in amusement when I cocked my confused head to the side. "It's a phenomenon that occurs on rare occasions when interfering with the past. Well, that's only what this is if Laputa really is the Disappearing Mountain."

Fair... It was possible that Chirika only thought they were similar. Maybe it was a totally different mountain after all.

"Hmm..."

My head was starting to hurt, so I decided to give up thinking about it any further.



Now that all the stories this time had been solved, it was time to send everyone back to their proper time periods. As for how exactly we'd do that, the Nyanyan we'd met at the bottom of the ocean had told us to consult the king of Laputa. We did, and she revealed to us that the device used for time travel was at the top of the Great Library of the Heavens. In other words, at the summit of Laputa.

"So where's the... What was it again? The Timeshift Device?"

"It's that pillar... over there. That is... the core."

There was a single steel obelisk in the direction the king was pointing, standing in an open space at the top of the mountain.

"Hm..."

"What's wrong... Chirika?"

"It's just strikingly similar... Except the Disappearing Mountain had a lone cedar tree instead of this metal structure."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but indeed... The metal tower

certainly does stand out. I'll have to take note of that with the camouflage. A lone cedar... might do quite well."

As the Laputian king muttered that, she prompted us to move beside the steel tower. The Timeshift Device was activated by pouring a huge amount of energy into the tower part.

"Rekka and I are from different time periods, so is it really all right for us to go together?"

"It's... not a problem." the king answered briefly.

I'm... I'm sure it'll work out one way or another.

"If you'd like... I can send you to any location you prefer."

"You can do such a thing?"

"As long as there are coordinates... Yes."

"In that case, I can help," volunteered Satsuki.

The two of them then began preparations to use the device. With her magic, Satsuki'd be able to find coordinates for us in no time.

"What about you, Chirika? Do you want to set a location point?"

"Unfortunately, I have no idea what coordinates are."

"Then you can just get Satsuki to help look it up. Hey, Satsuki."

I asked her to help search for the information Chirika needed. At any rate, once the preparations were completed, we were finally ready to return to the future.

"Rekka, I can't express how grateful I am to you... And Chirika and Sherlyn too. You all saved me. Thank you."

As the only one in the right time period, Nyanyan was seeing us off with tears in her eyes as she thanked us.

"Don't worry about it. You saved me too, after all," Sherlyn said with a smile, pointing at Nyanyan's head. "That crown suits you much better than it did me."

"Thank you... Thank you so much," Nyanyan said, wiping her eyes and smiling.

Without Atlantis, she no longer had a kingdom to rule, but she would still lead her people in their new land.

“Take care.”

“You too, Rekka.”

After Nyanyan and I exchanged our farewells, I looked to Chirika, who was standing with her arms crossed.

“This is goodbye for us too, Chirika. We’ll both be going back to our own times.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

Chirika looked rather restless for some reason, so I tried asking her about it, but...

“Nothing. It’s just...” she murmured and turned away. “I am also indebted to you. If you were from my time, I would have recommended you to my lord for an appropriate reward.”

“Ahaha, I’m honored. Although I wouldn’t do well with the whole samurai thing.”

“Indeed, you’re not diligent enough,” she said with a sigh.

I guess she saw right through me.

“But you have both courage and quick wits. You may have some surprising uses in directing people on the battlefield.”

“You think so?”

That was some strangely high praise coming from her...

“That’s... That’s actually not what I wanted to say. What I meant to tell you... was...”

Chirika had been acting weird for a while now.

“Urgh. I’ve been under the care of the princess this whole time, so I’m not sure how to talk to boys at times like this...” Chirika continued to mutter to

herself.

Could it possibly be that she was sad to part ways? We were from different time periods, after all. Our goodbye here would be goodbye forever. We had gone on an adventure together that transcended time. She may have disliked me a fair bit in the beginning, but maybe... Just maybe, we were a little bit closer now.

“Well, take care of yourself, Chirika. I’m not sure we’ll ever see each other again, but with my bloodline, you never know,” I said, offering my hand out to her.

“...Yeah.”

Chirika stared at my hand for a few seconds before she hesitantly returned the handshake and nodded with a smile.

“Now... Let us commence the timeshift,” the king called out as a white light began flooding out from the device. “Perhaps fate will bring us together again.”

She must have overheard my talk with Chirika, and said those words in a final parting. The white light then enveloped us all, and the last thing I saw was Nyanyan waving.



And so we safely returned to the future. Or rather, the present.

“Phew, I’m tired...”

“Me too...”

After returning home, Harissa and I first changed our clothes before melting into the sofa to rest. Rachelle was just floating around.

“Rekka, can I borrow your shower?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

Sherlyn had come from overseas, so she was resting at my place for now too. Chelsea had tried to take her back to her place, but she smoothly turned her down and chose to stay at my place instead. Well, Chelsea’s apartment was a few stations away like Hibiki’s was, so I guess it was easier to just stay here.

Thanks to Satsuki and the Laputian king, we'd returned in town not too far from my house. And it was a good thing, too. I was exhausted from our time-traveling, high-flying, water-racing adventure.

"And to think I still have school tomorrow. I want to rest, but my attendance..."

It was a difficult decision. I really wanted a break... This was probably why Chirika had said I was lacking diligence, huh?

All things considered, this was the first time I'd ever had to part ways with a heroine for good. While there had been heroines who lived in space or other worlds, I could still go visit them whenever I wanted.

But, well, considering all the stories I get caught up in, I guess something like this was bound to happen eventually. Really, it was more amazing that all the heroines I'd rescued so far came together like they did.

Why were there so few farewells with the heroines anyway? I think R said something about how her story prevented them from leaving in the middle, right? Wait... In that case, why did I part with the heroines this time? Unless...

Just as I was pondering deeply about such things, the doorbell rang.

"Ah, a guest."

"It's fine, Harissa. Let me get it for once."

I stopped Harissa from getting up and headed towards the front door.

"Coming! Now, who could it... be?"

The sight that awaited me when I opened the door was...

"Long time no see, Rekka."

"It's been a while."

"It has, boy."

The politely bowing Nyanyan, a gently smiling Chirika, and the king of Laputa all greeted me.



For now, the four of us moved to the living room. Harissa was quite surprised to see them, but Rachelle had a hungry look in her eyes, so I tied her up with a rope and left her in my room on the second floor before she got too annoying.

At any rate... the three people sitting on the sofa were no different than when we last saw them just a short while ago. If anything, the only thing that had changed was their outfits; they were now all dressed in modern clothing. The Laputian king was even on a Segway instead of her flying sphere.

“...All right, please explain what’s going on, Your Majesty.”

“Oh... You want us to explain it?”

“You seem the most knowledgeable, after all.”

“Very well...” Sandwiched by Nyanyan and Chirika on the sofa, the Laputian king nodded once. “We used our cloning technology to transfer their memories and put them into cold sleep... only to wake them in the modern era.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because they requested it, of course,” she replied, glancing over at the girls in question.

I followed her gaze.

“Is that true, you two? But why?”

“Because we wanted to see you again,” answered Nyanyan. “After parting ways with Rekka, we Atlantians were taken in by the people of Shangri-La.”

“Really?”

“Yes. We were foreigners to the people of this land, so it wasn’t easy for us to settle here. But after we’d helped them, the people of Shangri-La were happy to welcome us there, so we staked out some land and made a life for ourselves with them.”

“Wow... But could all the Atlantians really fit in Shangri-La?”

“It’s another dimension, so to speak, so it was a much bigger world than you might expect.”

I see. Apparently what I saw of Shangri-La was only a small part of it.

“That’s great.”

“Yes. Without Atlantis, I was able to cast aside my title as king and simply work together with everyone to live happily.”

Nyanyan lowered her eyes slightly as she recalled those days. Her face looked exactly like it had when I last saw her, yet she seemed so much more mature.

“That was how I was able to fulfill my duty, but I still had one last regret I couldn’t shake.”

And that was probably her wish to see me again, I guess.

“That was when I asked the king of Laputa, who I remained friends with even after I moved to Shangri-La, and had her make a new body to copy my memories into. She then put me to sleep until your time period rolled around so I could come see you after you returned from Atlantis.”

“I see... Well, I guess I understand things from Nyanyan’s point of view now.”

I looked to Chirika next. When she noticed my gaze, she simply raised an eyebrow.

“But what about you, Chirika? You returned to your time period, right? So what made you go back to the Laputian king?”

“My reasons were the same as Nyanyan’s,” Chirika answered readily with a smile. “Let me tell you about what happened first. When I returned to my original time, there was no legend of the Gold Yaksha, and the princess was safe and sound.”

“I see. That’s great.”

“Indeed. After that, I intended on serving her until my body crumbled to dust... But one day, the princess dismissed me.”

“Dismissed?”

“To put it simply, I was fired.”

“Huh?! But why?”

Despite my surprise, Chirika continued to talk with a peaceful expression.

“She told me I was always looking off into the distance and thinking of

someone else. The princess had already wed by that time, so my duty as a bodyguard was mostly ceremonial. She said that she was freeing me to go search for my own happiness.”

So that’s what she meant by a dismissal. I was relieved it wasn’t as bad as it sounded.

“And so, I relied on my memory of that time you were taking photos of the mountain to find the Great Library of the Heavens, and I had the king of Laputa accommodate me.”

“I see.”

I mostly understood what was going on after hearing them out, though I still had some questions.

“But aren’t the two of you rather young? Based on your stories, you both were much older when you went back to the king of Laputa...”

“Don’t mention age,” Chirika said with a sharp glare, making me shrink away.

“Cloning doesn’t copy the age of the body at the moment of cloning. It takes the genetic information from one’s cells and grows a new body through cell division. From there, the body can be put into cold sleep at any age,” Nyanyan explained carefully, clearing up my questions for now. “We wanted to reunite with you as the girls you knew.”

“Indeed.”

Their appearances were identical to how they looked when I saw them last, yet there was something serene about the both of them now. Perhaps that was the effect of the lives they’d lived and all the experience they’d accumulated in the meantime. Incidentally, the two of them were both freeloading at the Great Library of the Heavens right now. They were learning everything they needed to know about the modern era from the king of Laputa.

“Come to think of it, is the Great Library of the Heavens still disguised as a mountain? Where is it?”

“Roughly 30 minutes south of here.”

“Oh, that’s nice—wait, that’s really close!”

There were quite a few mountains in the countryside, but... to have a beast sealed underground, a former flying island camouflaged as a mountain, *and* a vampire's estate not too far away... That could only happen in this town.

"And so..." There, Chirika abruptly cleared her throat. "Now that you've reunited with us like this... Don't you have something to say?"

"Yeah, I'm definitely glad to see you again."

"That's not it. Isn't there anything else?"

"Well, uh..."

"What about to me?"

For some reason, Nyanyan joined the conversation, and the both of them looked right at me. I could tell they wanted something, but I wasn't sure what.

"Erm... Would you like to stay for dinner? Harissa's cooking is delicious."

"Raaaargh!"

"Urrrrgh!"

The two of them instantly fell off the sofa.

"Hey, you! The first thing you have to say upon seeing me after I've been pining for tens, no, hundreds of years is praise for another woman's cooking?!" Chirika immediately stood back up and grabbed my collar with all her might, lifting me up.

"H-Hey, it may have seemed like several hundred years to you, but we were separated for less than an hour to me!"

"See? That's why I told you it'd be more effective to wait three days. Chirika just had to insist on coming to see you as soon as possible," Nyanyan said with a sigh, causing Chirika's face to turn bright red.

"But you wanted to see him just as much! And don't reveal things like that!" she yelled loudly as she repeatedly hit Nyanyan.

But it was my turn next. The still-red Chirika then violently pointed a finger and a glare my way.

"And you! Just why do you think I came here to see you in the first place?!"

You should be able to tell that—”

Just as Chirika was about to shout the last half of her sentence, the living room door opened with a clack as Sherlyn walked in, having finished her shower.

“Oh? Nyanyan and Chirika... The king, too. What are you all doing here?”

“Hold it right there, Sherlyn! Put on a shirt first!”

She’d managed to get a bottom on, so how come she was only wearing a towel draped over her shoulders on her upper half?!

“What? But I get hot after I take a shower...”

“Just do it!”

I pushed Sherlyn down the corridor while trying to avert my eyes. After a few minutes, she returned with clothes on, and we rehashed Nyanyan and Chirika’s stories for her.

“Hmm...”

As she dried her hair with a towel, Sherlyn gave the two girls a knowing nod. They both looked away.

“Well, I was hoping to cunningly steal a certain treasure like a phantom thief, but I guess this means I have to give up for today.”

“What treasure?”

Was there anything in my house that was worth stealing to a phantom thief? Don’t tell me she wanted my wallet...

“Your chastity.”



“Bwuh?!”

The words that left Sherlyn’s mouth made everyone other than the Laputian king nearly jump out of their seat. And then there was R, of course, who was her usual self.

“Sherlyn! What are you saying?!”

“Oh, nothing. It’s just that you caught my eye. I’m the type that likes to take the things I want, you see.” Sherlyn laughed heartily, without a care for the incredible glares that were being directed at her. “Hmm, I wonder if I should move to this area too. Are there still free apartments in the building Chelsea lives in?”

For some reason, Sherlyn began pondering her plans for the future. Was it just my imagination, or was the temperature in the room gradually rising? I was at loss, cold sweat dripping down my back, when all of a sudden I heard a loud stomping from the next floor and then someone running down the stairs.

“I have detected a large amount of love energy and descended! Now, where is it?! Show me that lovely scene of carnage!”

It was Rachelle. She’d apparently been able to rip right through the rope with her freshly replenished love energy.

“Hey, wait a minute, Sherlyn. I’ve waited 500 years for this, you know? You should at least give me the first go.”

“In that case, I’ve waited a thousand years longer than you, Chirika! If you’re going to talk about order, shouldn’t I go first?”

“Isn’t it first come, first served?”

“Aah, yes! That’s it! Premium love energy is flowing into meee!”

My living room was gradually descending into chaos...

“Hey, Your Majesty...”

“What?”

“Could you put me into cold sleep, too? Maybe until winter break?”

“Being sly like that won’t help you, boy.”

The king bluntly rejected me, and all I could do was look up at the ceiling and sigh.

—*Fin*—

Afterword And so the legend continues... into the end of the twelfth volume of this legendary battlefield love comedy. To the Namekos continuing from volume 11, long time no see. To first time readers buying all 12 volumes at once, welcome! Nice to Nameko-meet you. What did you think of the stories that transcended time and space in this volume? I wanted to do something like this before, so being able to actually do it made me very happy, although it ended up kind of dense as a result... (*sweats*) I hope you were all able to enjoy it too.

Next, acknowledgments. To Mr. Nao Watanuki: we've almost reached 30 heroines, but thank you for designing such charming girls again this volume. The main heroines are lovely, but the minor character of the king of Laputa was my personal favorite.

On another note, the editor for this volume changed from Mr. Nanbu to Mr. Kinoshita. To Mr. Nanbu: thank you very much for supporting *I Saved too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse* all this time. To Mr. Kinoshita: I have a weird pen name, but I'm looking forward to working with you on the series from here on out.

And to all the personnel in the HJ Bunko editing and sales departments, the bookstores that put this book on the shelves, the readers that picked it up, and everyone else who has taken part in *Little Apocalypse* before, please accept my sincerest gratitude! I hope you'll continue to support it.

I plan on bringing you volume four of *Boku to Kanojo ga Geboku de Dorei de Shuujuu Keiyaku* (from Fujimi Fantasy Bunko) next. I'll work hard so that both series are enjoyable for everyone in the future too! Let's meet again soon.

This is the illustrator, Nao Watanuki, here to take up a section of the afterword!

Your draft for this volume is the Gold Yaksha himself. His design was based on lion costumes, but in the final version he got a little rougher with a focus on the demon mask.

Boboza, however, was exactly the same as his draft. I quite like how detailed he ended up. His hand covers (?) match Nyanyan's and are very seaweed-like. I hope he does his part to lead Atlantis justly!

Nao Watanuki

[Bubble] To Mr. Namekojirushi and all the editors, thank you for your hard work! I was saddened to learn that, as of this volume, the head editor would be changing. Thank you for your guidance all this time. I hope you will continue to watch over us from afar at your new workplace too. I'm sure Mr. Namekojirushi already did, but I'd like to take this chance to welcome the new editor too. I look forward to working with you from here on out!

Sorry my personal message got so long this time, but lastly, I'd like to thank the readers. I hope we meet again in the next volume!

It's hot out there, but stay healthy!



挿絵担当・和狸ナオと申します。

あとがき1頁お邪魔させていただきます



12巻ラフ案は黄金夜叉でお送りします。
連獅子がモチーフでしたが、本編では
鬼面を意識したゴリい風貌になっています。

ボボザは案そのまま。小物らしさが出せて
結構気に入っています。ニヤニヤと揃いの手甲(?)が
とても海藻っぽい...その後、潔くアランティスを
支えてくれていることを期待しています!

和狸ナオ拝。

なめこ印先生、編集様方お疲れ様でした。
なんと、今巻よりお世話になった担当の方が
変わる事となり、淋しい限りです。これまで
ご指導本当にありがとうございました!
新しい場でも見守って頂ければ幸いです。
そして早速お手数をお掛けしている
ものの、頼もしく対応して下さい。
新担当様、改めて
よろしくお願い致します!
私信ばかり長くなってしまいましたが、
最後にお読み頂きました読者様に
感謝を。
また次巻でお会いできれば嬉しいです。
暑いですが、どうぞお元気で!





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I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse: Volume 12

by Namekojirushi

Translated by Mana Z

Edited by Megan Denton

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Original Japanese edition published in 2014 by Hobby Japan

This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo

English translation © 2019 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: February 2019

I SAVED CAUSED THE TOO MANY AND GIRLS APO CALYPSO



Author: NAMEKOJIRUSHI
Illustration: NAO WATANUKI